

Amman to be Arab Cultural Capital for 2002

AMMAN (J.T.) — Amman has been confirmed by UNESCO as the Arab Regional Cultural Capital City for the year 2002, according to a statement issued on Tuesday. The decision, which was made during the Conference of Arab Cultural Ministers held in Sharjah, UAE late last year, has been endorsed by the Arab states grouping within UNESCO. Sharjah held the title of Arab Cultural Capital in 1998. The full list of Cultural Capital Cities of the Arab states region over the next five years is: 1999 Beirut, 2000 Riyadh, 2001 Kuwait City, 2002 Amman, 2003 Rabat, 2004 Khar-toum.

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Decree approves Amnesty Law

AMMAN (Petra) — A Royal Decree was issued on Tuesday approving the Amnesty Law for 1999, effective as of the date of publication in the official gazette. Justice Minister Hamzah Haddad said the General Prosecution on Tuesday informed general prosecutors to act in accordance with the law as soon as it becomes effective, and in line with their authorisation, to release detainees benefiting from the amnesty "without any delay."

Cuba sentences man to death for bombings

HAVANA (AP) — A Salvadoran man who confessed to a string of hotel bombings has been convicted of terrorism and sentenced to death by a Cuban tribunal, the government announced Tuesday. Under Cuban law, the death sentence of Raul Ernesto Cruz Leon will be immediately appealed to the supreme court, the Communist party daily Granma said in a three-paragraph story in Tuesday's edition. The verdict in the trial of a second Salvadoran charged with terrorism, Otto Rene Rodriguez Llerena, is pending. The prosecution has also recommended the death penalty in his case. The blasts killed an Italian man and injured 11 people, including seven foreigners.

Cypriot warden killed in car blast

LIMASSOL (AFP) — Cyprus's chief game warden was killed in a powerful car bomb blast Tuesday, an attack the authorities suspect is linked to a feud between wildlife officers and poachers over illegal hunting. Savvas Savva, 52, died in the busy southern port city of Limassol just after he had dropped his young son and daughter off to school, and the killing triggered a wave of outrage on this eastern Mediterranean island. A 25-year-old unemployed man identified as Charalambos Panayi Spiros was later arrested in connection with the bombing. Local media reports say Savva had compiled hard evidence against a specific individual suspected of involvement in the organised black market trade of protected game species.

Japanese ships fire at suspected N. Korean vessels

TOKYO (AFP) — Japanese naval ships fired warning shots early Wednesday at the two suspected North Korean ships fleeing Japanese territorial waters, officials said. The shots were fired after Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi ordered the full participation of Japan's defence forces in the pursuit by invoking for the first time a special clause in the defence force law. The clause allows Japanese forces to take "necessary action" in protecting human lives and assets and maintaining security at sea.

U.N. assures Libya on sanctions

UNITED NATIONS (R) — The Security Council assured Libya on Tuesday that U.N. sanctions would be suspended as soon as it handed over two suspects accused of the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. In a letter to Secretary General Kofi Annan, Libya agreed to surrender the two men to him no later than April 6, the first time a specific date had been mentioned for handing over the suspects to a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands. Welcoming Libya's letter, council members said they "looked forward to the implementation of that hand-over," according to a statement read by the council president.

Solana orders NATO strikes after Kosovo talks collapse

Primakov cancels U.S. trip; Yugoslavia in state of emergency

Agencies
YUGOSLAV PRESIDENT Slobodan Milosevic defiantly threw out a last-ditch Kosovo peace effort on Tuesday and the West said it was ready to launch air strikes against Yugoslavia, presaging a possible new war in Europe. In Brussels, NATO Secretary General Javier Solana directed NATO Supreme Commander Gen. Wesley Clark to begin military intervention in the Kosovo crisis with air operations against military targets in Yugoslavia. Solana did not give any timing for the start of air strikes. "I have just directed SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander Europe] Gen. Clark to initiate air operations in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia," Solana told reporters at NATO headquarters in Brussels. "All efforts to achieve a negotiated, political solution to the Kosovo crisis having failed, no alternative is open but to take military action," he said. Solana said peace efforts had failed "due entirely to the intransigence" of the government in Belgrade. Military action was intended to support

the political aims of the international community, he said. "It will be directed towards disrupting the violent attacks being committed by the Serb army and special police forces and weakening their ability to cause further humanitarian catastrophe," he added. Earlier on Tuesday, U.S. Balkans envoy Richard Holbrooke ended two days of talks in the Yugoslav capital saying Milosevic had refused to rein in an offensive by his security forces in Kosovo or allow NATO troops in to implement an autonomy plan for the province. "NATO is now united and prepared to carry out its warning. If President Milosevic is not willing to make peace, we are willing to limit his ability to make war on the Kosovars," U.S. President Bill Clinton said after the talks broke down. Shortly afterwards, Yugoslav Prime Minister Momir Bulatovic, Milosevic's right-hand man, read out a declaration on state television, saying the government had declared "a state of immediate threat of war, given that there exists a threat of an aggression."

Russia warned any use of force could destabilise the world. "We are categorically against this, categorically," Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov said before cancelling an expected visit to Washington. Moscow also called for a United Nations arms embargo against Yugoslavia to be lifted. But the allies appeared determined to press ahead. Italy spelled out plans for strikes, which Western officials have said could start within hours, and Britain and France said they were ready to take part in any bombing. In Kosovo, homes burned and shellfire echoed over the central Drenica region as the Yugoslav military pursued an offensive against strongholds of separatist ethnic Albanian guerrillas. Aid workers say the fighting has driven 40,000 people, a vast majority of them ethnic Albanians, from their homes over the last week since international peace monitors left the province in anticipation of possible NATO bombing. Ironically, NATO air strikes could trigger devastating attacks against ethnic Albanians, whom the West has vowed to protect, since extremist Serbian politicians have sworn to avenge any

attack by the West by attacking their proteges. Moscow denied it was supplying Yugoslavia with weapons after authorities in Azerbaijan stopped a cargo plane with MIG jet fighters in it they said were bound for Yugoslavia. But tough words from Russia in opposition to any bombing raised the stakes in a conflict which risks a wider Balkan war. "It defies common sense and could destabilise the situation in the world," Primakov said in Ireland before heading back home rather than flying on to Washington as originally planned. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia closed its border with Kosovo to Yugoslav passport-holders on Tuesday, fearing instability on its own territory, where the ethnic Albanian minority has been inspired by the year-old conflict next door. Aid workers left Kosovo for Macedonia and Western embassies in Belgrade started evacuating their remaining staff.

(Continued on page 2)

Clinton advises Arafat against declaring statehood on May 4

Agencies
U.S. PRESIDENT Bill Clinton tried Tuesday to dissuade Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from declaring a Palestinian state on May 4 during a meeting here between the two men on Tuesday, U.S. officials said. After a 90-minute discussion with the U.S. president, including one hour behind closed doors, Arafat said he "listened very carefully to the valuable advice and opinion of President Clinton."

Without elaborating on his talks with Clinton, he said Palestinian statehood was the subject of a "very extensive and in-depth conversation" during a meeting he described as "constructive and fruitful." "The most important thing that came out is that despite all the difficulties and obstacles we face today, President Clinton has shown me the determination to protect, to preserve and to move forward the peace process," Arafat said. Earlier on Tuesday, Arafat repeated President Clinton's pledge in December that the Palestinian people are free to determine their destiny on their own land.

Speaking to reporters after meeting with U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, the Palestinian leader said he was consulting with world leaders on the "sacred date" of May 4 — the day he has said he intends to make a unilateral declaration of statehood. Following his global consultations, he said the Palestinian leadership will meet and decide what to do on the statehood issue. Arafat noted that U.N. Resolution 181, adopted in 1947, refers to a Palestinian state —

and he said Amman supports it. The resolution also calls for Jerusalem to become an international city. Israel's U.N. Ambassador Dore Gold accused the Palestinian leader of trying to "stake territorial claims inside of Israel." In Washington, the U.S. State Department said the May 4 deadline for the Oslo peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians is not binding and could be extended.

(Continued on page 2)

PNA helped Israel thwart Hamas bombing in Tel Aviv

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (Agencies) — The Palestinian National Authority helped Israel thwart a massive suicide bombing in the Tel Aviv area by Islamic militants three weeks ago, officials said on Tuesday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday he had called PNA chief Yasser Arafat to thank him for helping foil the attack. Netanyahu, who has frozen peace accords with the Palestinians on the grounds that not enough was being done to fight anti-Israeli violence, called the cooperation "a positive step." But he quickly added that "the Palestinian Authority is not acting systematically" against terrorism. Palestinian sources said their security services had discovered that militants of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) had had succeeded in smuggling a large bomb into Tel Aviv in preparation for an attack. The Palestinians gave the information to U.S. security officials for transmission to Israeli authorities, the sources said.

"Investigations by the security apparatus led to the arrest of those preparing the device to be used in the operation and of the man who had smuggled the bomb to a hideout north of Tel Aviv," one source told AFP. "The man who smuggled the device was a drug dealer known to have connections with Israeli drug merchants," he said. The sources said Palestinian security officials were hunting for three Hamas fugitives who may have been involved in the plot, including Mahmoud Abul Hanoud. Hanoud, from the Nabhus region, is suspected of helping organise two multiple suicide bombings in Jerusalem in the summer of 1997 in which 21 Israelis were killed. Also on Tuesday, a brother of a top Palestinian security official was charged by an Israeli military court with recruiting members for Hamas. The defendant, Yasser Rajoub, is a brother of Jibril Rajoub, who as head of the Preventive Security Services in the West Bank has headed the Palestinian National Authority's crackdown on

Islamist militants. Yasser Rajoub was arrested by Israel in February. On Tuesday, he was charged by a military court at the West Bank army base of Beit El with belonging to Hamas and recruiting members for the group. The Palestinians, backed by Washington, say they have lived up to their security obligations under peace accords with Israel. They charge that Netanyahu has suspected the land-for-security deals as a campaign ploy to avoid alienating right-wing voters ahead of Israeli general elections in May. Netanyahu has made his tough handling of the Palestinian issue the central plank of his campaign for reelection, charging that his more dovish opponents would not defend Israeli security interests in negotiations with Arafat. The Palestinian official alleged that Hamas decided not to order the bomb attack because they wanted to see the outcome of contacts between some of their leaders held in Israeli prisons with the Israeli security apparatus.

Government extends IMF-backed reform programme for three years

By Ghadeer Taher
AMMAN — The government on Tuesday extended the country's IMF-prescribed economic reform programme for another three years, Finance Minister Michel Marto said. The International Monetary Fund blueprint, which will be presented to the fund's board on April 7 for approval, is essential for Jordan as it prepares to approach major creditors for a rescheduling of its \$6.8 billion debt. Jordan will meet with the Paris Club of creditor nations on April 15 to try to delay principal and interest payments due this year, Marto said. This year alone Jordan owes creditors \$812 million compared to \$500 million in 1998. It is expected that an estimated \$200 million of the payment due this year will be rescheduled, easing the country's massive debt burden — a key impediment to accelerating economic growth. "The new programme is a continuation of the macro-adjustment plan with some fine-tuning," said another official describing the plan. "The

steps that need to be taken are extensive but the objectives remain the same; accelerate economic growth, maintain low inflation and increase foreign reserves." "Nothing in the programme could be termed controversial, and the 1999 budget reflects the IMF programme accurately," said the official. "There is no lifting of remaining subsidies, no increase in water prices... etc." The package conditions hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to economic reforms, mainly trade and tax reforms and tariff reductions, as well as tight fiscal policy, which has been spelled out in this year's \$2.16 billion budget. The Kingdom is hopeful that international support by world leaders for His Majesty King Abdullah following the death of King Hussein last month will translate into tangible economic support. But so far, apart from \$300 million pledged by the U.S. in additional financial and military aid and a \$150 million long-term deposit in the Central Bank of Jordan by the United Arab Emirates, few pledges

have materialised. Jordan expects that Saudi Arabia, Jordan's biggest financial backer prior to the 1990 Gulf crisis, will open its markets to Jordanian workers and produce. Jordan also expects that the Saudi Development Fund will again extend loans to the Kingdom, especially for infrastructure projects targeting lower-income groups. News reports that Riyadh was considering forgiving an estimated \$160 million of Jordan's debt have not been confirmed by officials. The structural reform programme, which is underpinned by an estimated \$150 million a year in IMF financing, places special emphasis on privatising state monopolies to help revive the recession-hit economy. The failure to forge ahead with privatisation of the Jordan Telecommunications Corporation, as well as other state assets including the Aqaba Railway Corporation, has cast doubt on the commitment of successive governments to privatisation. Unless the government is serious about using some of the proceeds from the sell-off

of state enterprises to rehabilitate and retrain redundant employees, privatisation could become a minefield for Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh's team, said the official. The IMF, according to one economist, has asked the government to present a specific plan for privatising the telecommunications firm, which so far has been bogged down in controversy, especially after the resignation of its chairman of the board — a vocal opponent of selling a stake of the firm to a strategic partner. Jordan and the IMF have agreed on a seven per cent budget deficit for this year. By the end of the programme, Jordan hopes to reign in the deficit to around four per cent of gross domestic product. Last year, the budget deficit grew to nearly 10 per cent, well above the IMF-set target of 3.5 per cent. That and a sharp slowdown in economic growth forced Jordan to extend a 10-year programme with the fund, which ended in February of this year.

(Continued on page 2)



His Majesty King Abdullah receives Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani at Amman military airport on Tuesday (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

King, Qatari emir discuss bilateral ties, peace process

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday held talks with Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani at Raghadan Palace on bilateral relations and cooperation. The two leaders, who first met privately before they were joined by their delegations, reaffirmed their determination to enhance cooperation in various fields. The two leaders also discussed the Middle East peace process and means of pushing it forward and reaffirmed the need for the concerned parties to be committed to the implementation of the signed agreements which provide for final status negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel. Two sides asserted their support for the Palestinian people and their leadership in their struggle to realise their legitimate rights and establish an independent state on Palestinian soil. King Abdullah and Sheikh Hamad also reviewed current Arab affairs, stressing the need for efforts to revive joint Arab

action and achieve solidarity among Arab states in order to safeguard the higher national interests. With reference to the Iraq situation, the two leaders reaffirmed the need to put an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people and to guarantee the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. In a joint press conference, Foreign Minister Abdul Ilah Khatib and his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Hamad Ben Jasssem Al Thani stressed the need to enhance bilateral relations and joint Arab action in general. Khatib said the work of joint Qatari-Jordanian committees, which will meet soon, will be further activated. "There is full agreement on all issues that were tackled during the meeting," Khatib said, describing Jordanian-Qatari relations as "a model." He said the talks also dealt with the Middle East peace process and means of supporting the Palestinian people in their drive to regain their rights, as well as the suffering of the

Iraqi people. For his part, the Qatari minister said that the visit aimed at enhancing in particular economic relations. "We are here to support Jordan in various fields, particularly in the economic field," said Sheikh Hamad. He added that Qatar supports the Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese in their drive to attain peace, adding that the stalled peace process is due to Israeli "intransigence." "We are looking forward to the Israeli elections, hoping that the next government will keep in mind that the peace process has to be achieved because the pledges on peace were adopted by the state of Israel, not the Israeli government." Sheikh Hamad, who arrived in Amman on Tuesday accompanied by a high-ranking delegation, was met upon arrival by King Abdullah, Royal family members and senior government officials. Sheikh Hamad and his delegation are due to end their visit and fly home on Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia mobilises to avoid repeat of past tragedies at Haj

JEDDAH (AFP) — Saudi authorities have brought in new rules for the "stoning of Satan," more fireproof tents and a ban on gas stoves in a bid to avoid any repeat of past tragedies at the Mecca pilgrimage.

On Tuesday, Muslim pilgrims from inside the kingdom started converging on Mecca and Medina, western Saudi Arabia, in the footsteps of some 1.2 million pilgrims from abroad.

The annual pilgrimage known as the Haj draws a total of some two million Muslims and this year starts on Thursday.

The authorities have been adding the final touches to a package of measures to avoid fires and stampedes, which together have claimed 2,365 lives and wounded almost as many since 1975, according to official figures.

After a 1997 fire which swept through a tent camp in Mina, valley adjoining

Mecca, killing 343 people, Haj organisers started to put up high-tech, fireproof tents.

Some 11,000 were erected in 1998 and an extra 17,000 this year, covering 65 per cent of the pilgrims' camp at Mina, where the worshippers gather on the first day of Haj.

Each tent, made of fibre-glass coated with teflon, has a heat-sensitive water sprinkler, which is linked to an alarm system, and electric lighting.

Saudi Arabia has said that by the Haj 2000, the entire site will be covered with 40,000 fireproof tents as part of a safety package costing \$640 million.

The authorities have also renewed a ban on gas stoves and the stockpiling of gas canisters, in force since the 1997 blaze which was blamed on a gas stove used in a tent.

Pilgrims have been urged to turn to fast-food outlets, "As from Thursday, they

will find almost two million fast-food meals prepared by Saudi firms and on sale at 1,500 points" around Islam's holiest sites, Mohammad Hussein Qarub of the Saudi commerce ministry told reporters.

And to avoid the kind of stampede which last year killed 118 pilgrims in Mina, also near Mecca, new measures have come into effect for the "stoning of Satan," the final ritual of the Haj.

The tragedy occurred on a bridge as crowds rushed to throw stones at pillars symbolising the devil.

To prevent the rush, Saudi religious leaders have issued fatwas, or religious decrees, authorising the ritual to carry on all day and not just after midday prayers as in past years.

"Since we can't enlarge the area, let us extend the time for the stoning," said Sheikh Yusuf Al Qardawi, an Egyptian theologian based in

Qatar, who passed a similar fatwa this week.

He also backed a Saudi move to limit the pilgrimage to once every five years for residents of Saudi Arabia and suggested the same restriction could be applied to pilgrims from abroad.

Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam — along with belief in one God, five daily prayers, fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan, and giving alms — for every able-bodied Muslim who has the means.

The horror of fires and stampedes has prompted Saudi civil defence forces to mobilise 45 specialised fire-fighting teams, 12 rescue crews, and eight rapid intervention teams equipped with the latest technology.

A total of 169 motorcyclists, with mobile communications and fire-fighting equipment, will patrol the holy sites around the clock.



PALESTINIANS PROTEST AGAINST SETTLEMENT EXPANSION: Palestinian protesters wave national flags over a sign showing the way to the Jewish settlement of Morag in the Rafah area in Gaza Strip on Tuesday. The demonstrators were protesting against Israeli army confiscation of a piece of land to expand the settlement (AFP photo)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Kurds claim responsibility for pipeline blast

ANKARA (AFP) — The Kurdish Labour Party (PKK) has claimed responsibility for a bomb blast at a pipeline in south-eastern Anatolia which stopped the flow of Iraqi crude to Turkey for a day. German-based Kurdish news agency DEM said Tuesday. The PKK's armed wing, the Kurdistan People's Liberation Army (APRG), announced in a statement that its rebels had carried out the sabotage against the pipeline, the report said in a statement received here.

Man reunited with daughter kidnapped by mother

PARIS (AFP) — An Egyptian father has been reunited with his eight-year-old daughter who was kidnapped in August by her French mother. The prosecutor's office in the western city of Nantes said Tuesday. Layla Khalil was handed over to her father, Amr Khalil, late Monday in accordance with a court ruling giving him custody of the child. The ruling upheld a 1991 Egyptian court decision giving Khalil, 38, custody of his daughter and stripping the mother, Serenade Mosset, of any parental rights.

Yemeni FM to visit Kuwait after 'Eid

KUWAIT CITY (AFP) — Kuwait's foreign minister announced Tuesday that his Yemeni counterpart was expected to visit the emirate after the coming Muslim holidays, in a step towards restoring normal ties. "I have invited Yemen's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abdul Kader Bajammal to visit Kuwait, and he will come after the 'Eid,'" Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah said.

Israel begins expelling 860 bedouin

NITZANA (AFP) — The Israeli army began Tuesday expelling more than 800 bedouin who entered Israel illegally from Egypt last week but were refused asylum, officials said. A large force of army troops and policemen were deployed to oversee the expulsion via a desert border post near Nitzana, but there were no reports of trouble.

SLA member deserts

TYRE (AFP) — A member of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) has deserted from the militia and surrendered to the Lebanese army, security sources said on Tuesday. Marwan Khalil Nabaa, from the village of Shebaa in the western sector of the Israeli-occupied border zone in southern Lebanon, fled on foot through ravines to avoid Israeli and SLA checkpoints, they said. Once out of the enclave, Nabaa asked to surrender to the Lebanese army.

Government extends reform programme for three years

(Continued from page 1)

The economy, which is forecast to register around two per cent growth in 1999, has suffered from a decade of drastic contraction of trade with Iraq and the loss of critical remittances from expatriate workers who returned from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia during the Gulf crisis.

Economic sanctions and low oil prices have cut exports to Iraq, Jordan's biggest trading partner, to a projected \$200 million this year, \$55 million less than in 1998. Jordan has also been frustrated by Israel's reluctance to open up the West Bank to Jordanian exports, which totalled less than \$25 million last year.

Officials forecast that

economic growth will eventually pick up with the resumption of export-oriented growth and multi-million dollar foreign investments in the mining and fertiliser sectors. They forecast that by the year 2001 economic growth will rise to 3-4 per cent. This is hardly enough, economists say, to stem the decline in per capita income.

To cushion the impact of a tight fiscal policy on the poor, estimated at one-third of the country's 4.6 million population, the government launched the Social Productivity Programme in 1997. It is also trying to increase micro-finance access and improve the efficiency of assistance distribution to the underprivileged.

Clinton advises Arafat against declaring statehood

(Continued from page 1)

Spokesman James Rubin said Washington would not object if negotiations between the two sides continued beyond that date if final status issues for Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Gaza were still unresolved.

"We don't think [the talks] should be opened, but nobody is going to stand in the way if both the Israelis and Palestinians want to discuss permanent status issues after May the fourth," Rubin said.

Rubin reiterated the U.S. position that any unilateral move by either side in the process would be destabilising, adding that Washington did not believe all the issues could be resolved in the next six weeks.

"I can tell you that May fourth is very soon and I don't think anybody thinks we're going to solve the permanent status issues by May fourth," he said.

A senior U.S. official said later that Washington was not opposed, as Israel is, to setting a deadline for the negotiations to be completed but that no decision on a timeframe had been set.

"One can certainly create target dates or target periods, but we haven't made any judgement in that regard," the official said.

After his meeting with Annan, which he called "very fruitful," he returned to Washington for talks with Clinton.

The Clinton administration has said it opposes a unilateral declaration of statehood and also any unilateral actions by

either side that could impede the peace process.

Asked in Arabic about the American rejection of Palestinian statehood, Arafat disputed the question's premise.

"There is no American refusal. As you may remember, President Clinton said in Gaza, 'on their free independent land,'" Arafat said, paraphrasing the U.S. leader.

On Dec. 14, during his first visit to Palestinian-controlled territory, Clinton said, "for the first time in the history of the Palestinian movement, the Palestinian people and their elected representatives now have a chance to determine their own destiny on their own land."

The comment was interpreted by Palestinians and even Israelis as U.S. recognition of Palestinian statehood aspirations.

Arafat stressed that the Oslo agreement was not a bilateral accord with Israel but an international agreement also signed by the United States, Russia, the European Union, Norway, Jordan and Egypt in the presence of the U.N. secretary general and the Japanese foreign minister.

He accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of freezing the peace process and said he wants the Clinton administration to help the Palestinians ensure "the thorough and faithful implementation of all... the agreements signed at the White House."

The Palestinians will deal with any threats by Netanyahu, Arafat said. The Israeli leader has warned that Israel will respond "very forcefully" if unilateral statehood is announced.

Solana orders NATO air strikes after Kosovo talks collapse

(Continued from page 1)

Around 10,000 NATO troops are lined up in Macedonia to enter Kosovo if Milosevic backs down and invites them in. Officials in Belgrade say they suspect they plan to force their way in but Western officials have firmly denied any such plan.

Holbrooke said before leaving Belgrade to brief NATO allies in Brussels that it was the grimmest moment since he began trying to restore peace to the Balkans after Yugoslavia's bloody disintegration.

"The situation is the bleakest since we began this effort almost four years ago," Holbrooke told CNN television.

He left an escape hatch ajar, saying communication lines were still open if Milosevic changed his mind, accepted the autonomy plan drawn up during lengthy negotiations in France and gave the go-ahead for a 28,000 NATO led force to police it.

But the Serbian parliament seemed to slam it shut by voting unanimously to reject the key demand for troops in Kosovo.

There was no comment from

Milosevic, who rose to power on a wave of Serbian nationalism only to oversee the collapse of the Serb-dominated multi-ethnic Yugoslav federation.

Milosevic, whose apparent shyness belies his authoritarian rule, has run circles around the West with his brinkmanship over his decade in power. But allowing war to engulf Serbia would bring him into uncharted territory.

One sign of nerves amid the bravado came from his dismissal of the Yugoslav army's security chief, the latest in a long line of military officers swept aside due to

what analysts say are doubts about their loyalty to the Yugoslav leader. In central Kosovo, freshly lit fires burned fiercely through the roofs of abandoned homes in Gornje Klna. Heavily armed Serb police could be seen walking through the debris and a burnt-out car smouldered by the roadside.

More smoke rose on the horizon from the town of Srbica, seized by Serb forces on Saturday and closed to reporters since.

Shells slamming into the hills near the village of Rezala and small-arms and machine-gun-fire sent ethnic Albanian rebels scurry-

ing for their fighting positions.

In the Kosovo capital Pristina, the streets were largely deserted by mid-afternoon apart from a queue for bread.

Some municipal authorities in Serbia issued instructions on clearing out bomb shelters for the public, but Natasha Kandic, a leading human rights lawyer, said callers to her office most feared war amid the biggest callup since World War II.

"People are afraid, not of being exposed to bombing but of what is going to happen in the war," she said.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

19:00Le Journal
19:15French Focus
19:30News headlines
19:33Documents Divers
20:30N.Y.P.D. Blue
21:15Divine Pledge
22:00News in English
22:30Cover Story

PRAYER TIMES

04:13Fajr
05:31(Sunrise) Duha
11:42Dhuhr
15:11Asr
17:53Maghreb
19:10Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweith, Tel. 5930740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel.
4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624833/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church
Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church
Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Lat-

ter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la

Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation

Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel.

4646138

Church of Presentation, Swe-

ith Tel. 5920146

The United Catholic Church

Tel. 4624757

The English-Language

Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel.

4892679

The Baptist Church Tel.

4628052

The Armenian Catholic

Church Tel. 4771331

The Armenian Orthodox

Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the

Department of Meteorology

Moderate weather conditions

will prevail with temperatures

rising further, and winds

southeasterly moderate. In

Aqaba, it will be warm and

sunny, winds northerly moder-

ate, and seas calm.

Amman07/19

Aqaba11/27

Deserts05/21

Jordan Valley12/25

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 15, Aqaba 24.

Humidity readings: Amman

55 per cent, Aqaba 40 per

cent.

Following are the tempera-

tures expected today in the fol-

lowing areas:

Ajloun05/14

Jerash07/19

Um Qays07/19

Madaba05/17

Petra06/19

Dead Sea13/26

USEFUL

TELEPHONE

NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

Dr. Bahjat Bader5332642

Dr. Nasser Ibrahim5350432

Dr. Wafiq Qaddumi4893542

Dr. Khalil Al Tusi4757253

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy5537004

Ruba Al Dawa Pharmacy 536169

IRBID:

Dr. Ghazi Ta'anneh (02)250080

Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)273360

ZARQA:

Dr. Walid Nabhan (05)3851743

Palestine Pharmacy (05)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637711

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Resc-

ue4630341

Civil Defence Emergency199

Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777

Fire Brigade4617101

Blood Bank4775121

Highway Police5343402

Traffic office4896390

Public Security Dept.4630321

Hotel Complaints5605800

Price Complaints5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints 489467

Amman Municipality Com-

plaints4787111

Telephone Information (directo-

ry assistance)121

Overseas Calls0132

Central Amman Telephone Repa-

irs4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101

Jordan Television4773111

Radio Jordan4774111

Water Authority5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co.4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

The Arab Centre for Heart and Spec-

ial Surgery5921199

The Islamic, Abdi5666131/7

Hussein Medical Centre5858856

Luzmila4630195

Khalidi Maternity4644281/6

Akileh Maternity4642441/2

Jabel Amman Maternity4612362

Malhas, J. Amman,4636140

Palestine, Stamezzani5607071

Shmezzani Hospital5607431

Jordan Hospital5607530

University Hospital5353444

Al-Mushar Hospital 5667227/9

Al-Ahli, Abdi5664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen 4777101/3

Al-Bashir4775111/26

Army, Marka4891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital5157100

Arnal Hospital5607155

Al Arnal Cancer Centre 5353000

Jerusalem Hospital4387181

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital

.....(05)983323

Zarqa National Hospital

.....(05)900560

Ibn Sina Hospital(05)986731

Al Hikma Modern Hospital

.....(05)990990

IRBID:

No more wondering 'where's the bus?' New buses ply new routes on fixed schedule

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — Commuters will finally begin riding in modern and clean buses with organised schedules as the Public Transport Company phases out its dilapidated fleet for scrap.

The government has awarded three local firms contracts to operate and manage four areas of operation for bus routes in the Greater Amman Municipality as a part of its efforts to rehabilitate and privatise the state-run PTC.

The Asia Transport Company, one of the three companies, on Monday began running its buses in the capital's streets.

The Asia Transport Company operates 26 buses along three routes in area two under a JD136,000 annual lease deal. The same firm will also operate the fourth area, which consists of seven main routes served by 39 buses, under an annual lease agreement worth JD196,000, said Samir

Ahmad, director of Land Transport Department at the Ministry of Transport.

The two areas covered by the new buses fleet are Khaldia, Tla'a Al Ali, Al Hussein Medical Centre neighbourhood, Wadi Seer, Sweifeh and Um Summaq.

However, passengers had mixed reactions about the new system. Ali Abdullah, 45, who works as a government employee said the new buses will help him better organise his time since it runs on a fixed schedule.

Others said it is premature to give judgement since the new routes only opened one day ago.

"I think the new buses will not be able to commit themselves to their schedules," a school boy on one bus told the Jordan Times.

The Ministry of Transport has formed a regulatory committee to oversee the three companies' operation in order to grant better passenger service for the passengers, Ahmad told the Jordan Times.

The Tawfiq Transportation and Investment Company will operate the first area, which includes eight main routes served by 60 buses, under JD40,000 lease agreement, he said.

The Jordanian Company for Consultation and Investment will operate the fourth area, which consists of seven main routes served by 40 buses, for JD85,000 per year.

The routes will be fully serviced before August 1999.

The contracts also include a requirement to import new vehicles in line with international standards and to operate routes according to fixed schedules. Insurance, communications and maintenance systems will be provided. Drivers will don uniforms on their eight-hour shifts.

In order to divert its interest in the indebted transport sector, the government last year asked a local accounting firm to begin liquidating the PTC's liabilities and sell its assets, mainly its

fleet of decrepit buses in use since the early 1980s.

The firm, a government monopoly which has maintained concession rights on all routes in the Amman area since its inception in the 1970s, has recorded monthly losses of JD100,000.

The company's buses currently service only five per cent of Amman's routes, while 500 smaller, more modern buses of 13 private operators ply the remainder of the routes under a 15-year concession granted seven years ago.

The corporation awarded the concession rights to operate the new buses after the Gulf crisis forced over 300,000 Jordanians to return from the Arab Gulf states, straining the firm's operations.

Despite their heavy dependence on public buses, commuters have long complained of unreliable, unsafe and low-quality service from the PTC.



French business delegation meets King, eyes business opportunities in Jordan

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah on Tuesday met a group of visiting French businessmen and discussed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation between the two countries, said Thierry de Beaucue, head of the delegation.

"The meeting was very fruitful, we were very interested in what King Abdullah said about the privatisation process in the Kingdom," Beaucue said at a press conference held at the French embassy in Amman.

"The King wants to open up Jordan's economy to foreign investment, speed up the privatisation process and reform administrative procedures to encourage foreign investment in the Kingdom," King Abdullah, in his

letter of designation asked the new government of Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh to trim the bloated bureaucracy and continue the economic reform programme earlier launched under directives by the late King Hussein.

"I hope the visit will result in further cooperation between French and Jordanian companies to build on investments by French companies in the tourism, water and cement sectors last year," he said.

In 1998, French cement giant Lafarge invested \$100 million in the privatisation of Jordan's only cement firm while the French water company Lyonnaise des Eaux invested around \$40 million in a project to restructure the distribution of water in the Jordanian capital.

The 51-month contract

will provide water and wastewater management and maintenance to the Greater Amman Municipality water network by reducing leaks and other losses.

Trade between Jordan and France is heavily in favour of France.

Jordan imported \$105 million worth of French goods in 1998 while the value of its exports to France reached only \$1.5 million.

French Ambassador in Amman Bernard Emie, meanwhile, stressed the importance of the visit, organised by the French business association, Medef International, which visited Jordan shortly after the death of King Hussein.

"The fact that this is the first time a large delegation of Western businessmen comes to Jordan after the transition period shows that France is com-

mitted to its strong relationship with Jordan," said Emie. "That such a large delegation comes to Jordan is a strong indication of France's trust in the stability of the Kingdom after the smooth power transition," said Emie.

King Abdullah expressed hope for further cooperation between the two countries in the agriculture and water sectors which face many difficulties.

The delegation, which arrived in Jordan from the Palestinian territories on Monday, also held meetings with Jordan's Minister of Trade and Industry Mohammad Asfour and Minister of Transport and Communications Jamal Saraireh. The team is due to meet the prime minister on Wednesday.

Armed robberies leave pharmacists at loss for adequate protection

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — There has been another assault on a pharmacy in the Kingdom, and the Jordan Pharmacists Association is saying that it plans to take protective measures to stop what it believes is an increasing problem.

Late on Sunday in Jabal Amman two armed men entered Al Nubal Pharmacy, held the assistant pharmacist at gunpoint and stole cash, a television and a video cassette recorder from the premises.

"This is the second time in less than one year that my pharmacy has been subjected to an armed robbery," said 21-year-old Mohammad Saleh, who was alone in the pharmacy.

The Jabal Amman incident

was typical of other armed robberies committed against pharmacies around the country.

"At around 9 p.m., two men entered the pharmacy and said they wanted a painkiller," said Saleh. "When I turned to go get the medicine, one of them grabbed me from the neck, and his colleague immediately pulled a gun and aimed it directly at my head."

"They forced me into the toilet, tied me and blindfolded me. One of them held the gun over my head while the other snatched my wallet along with the pharmacy keys," Saleh told the Jordan Times.

Saleh said he freed himself five minutes later. He said the assailants got away with around JD170 in cash and some electronic equipment.

Saleh's neighbours told the

Jordan Times they saw four young men described as in their early twenties leaving the pharmacy with electronic equipment.

Saleh said he immediately reported the incident to the police.

Three years ago, three pharmacists were killed in three separate attacks. Authorities then blamed the killings on drug abusers who they said were seeking narcotics. No arrests were made.

The Jordan Pharmacists Association has repeatedly urged the government to ensure better protection to pharmacists through more regular police patrols in the areas around drug stores, especially in remote places.

JPA President Abdul Rahim Issa told the Jordan Times on Tuesday that the association is

considering two major plans to protect its members.

"Two proposals are being studied by the association. The first entails hiring bodyguards in cooperation with Jordan Economic and Social Organisation of Retired Servicemen and the second is installing video cameras inside pharmacies."

However, Issa complained that the economic factor is the major stumbling block facing the implementation of either measure.

"We are currently negotiating with the concerned parties to find a possible means of cooperation which will satisfy all sides," he told the Jordan Times.

Saleh said he never thought about installing security systems because he believes "they never work properly."

News in brief

Queen receives Rafua

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah on Tuesday received Minister of Social and Development Faisal Rafua at the Royal Court. During the meeting the Queen stressed the need for social cooperation among community members in helping underprivileged families to improve their living standards. Queen Rania recommended that a feasibility study on the poor and their residences be conducted. She also called for finding solutions to their problems in an effort to alleviate their suffering.

Bridges to PNA to close

AMMAN (Petra) — The King Hussein and Prince Mohammad bridges to the Palestinian National Authority territories will be closed on March 27 except for those who hold Jerusalem identification cards or visas for touristic purposes. Public Security Department sources said on Tuesday.

Obeidat elected Senate deputy

AMMAN (Petra) — Former prime minister Ahmad Obeidat was elected on Saturday as first deputy president of the Upper House of Parliament following the resignation of Abdul Karim Kabarti, who was appointed Royal Court Chief three weeks ago. A Royal Decree was issued on Saturday appointing Faysal Tarawneh and Jawad Anani as senators as of March 17.

RSS holds IT course

AMMAN (Petra) — The Computer Technology, Training and Industrial Studies Centre at the Royal Scientific Society held an advanced and specialised regional training course in information technology for systems analysts and software engineers entitled "System Engineering." The course was held cooperation with Japan International Cooperation Agency and will run for a four-months period (March 21-July 20). Taking part in the course are Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Yemen, Oman and Bahrain.

Correction

In the story "Jewellers union warns against laser-treated diamonds" (J.T., p.3, March 22, 1999) the Jordan Times erroneously reported the name of the union's president as being Anwar Ghasi. The name of the president of the Jewellers Trade Union is Anwar Jabasini. The Jordan Times apologises for the error and regrets any inconvenience or offence it may have caused.

Maraqa 'disappointed' with some ER standards

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Health Ishaq Maraqa on Tuesday expressed disappointment with the "maintenance and cleanliness" of an emergency department he visited during an inspection on Tuesday of a government-run hospital.

He said the ministry has a contract with a maintenance and cleaning firm that should offer better services than that which he witnessed on a visit to emergency department. Maraqa, a neurosurgeon and former head of the Al Hussein Medical Centre, said that in general, he believed public health care

in the country was good, barring some pitfalls.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry announced on Tuesday that it will observe World Tuberculosis day today with special public awareness programmes in public schools about protection against the disease.

Maraqa said Jordan is considered among the foremost nations in the region to have successfully dealt with tuberculosis and other contagious diseases.

He said last year the ministry announced programmes to achieve total eradication of tuberculosis in Jordan by the year 2010.

What's Going On

LECTURE

• Lecture and slide show by Professor Tom Sandquist entitled "The Art of Ann Edholm" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh on Thursday March 25 at 6:00 p.m.

PLAYS

• "Beauty and the Beast" at the Amman Baccalaureate School at 6:30 p.m.
• Comedy entitled "A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed" at Al Thurayyah Hall, Village of Tayibat (Tel. 4380631, 4655585), (daily at 9:00 a.m.).

DIALOGUE

• Dialogue with Dr. Osama Ghazali, editor-in-chief of Al Siyass magazine, on "The International Political Changes and Their Impact on the Arab World" at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Weibdeh, at 6:30 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

• Works on paper by Russian artist Yuri Pestov entitled "Al Ferdouse, the Rose Garden" at the Jordanian Plastic Artists Association, Jabal Weibdeh, until March 31. (Tel. 4623297).

Families to visit prisoners in Israeli jails

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — Twenty-eight family members of Jordanian prisoners in Israel are due on Thursday to make their second visit in less than five months to their relatives in Ashkelon Prison, a senior official said Tuesday.

"The Jordanian Embassy in Israel concluded all arrangements needed for the second visit on Thursday to all 14 prisoners detained in Israel," Ambassador to Tel Aviv Omar Rifai told the Jordan Times in a telephone inter-

view Tuesday.

"We will supply transportation and arrange visas for all the visitors," Rifai added.

Last October, the embassy arranged the first such collective visit granted by Israeli authorities. At that time 21 relatives visited the prisoners.

Rifai said Israeli authorities agreed to grant visitors permits to only two family members for each prisoner.

The planned visit follows the first medical examination of the 14 prisoners by Jordanian

physicians on Sunday.

"Three military doctors from the Royal Medical Services on Sunday examined the 14 prisoners," said Rifai.

"I was told that generally they are in good condition, but the doctors will submit their final medical report to the Royal Medical Services," the ambassador said.

The medical team consisted of a general practitioner, a dentist and ophthalmologist.

The embassy had obtained Israeli approval in November 1998 to send

physicians to examine the prisoners. At that time it had prepared a list of five members of the Jordan Medical Association branch in Jerusalem, who they proposed as the examining doctors.

But Israeli authorities refused the Jerusalem list and insisted that the doctors come from Jordan.

The prisoners had been held in two jails in Shata and Nafha before their recent transfer to the Ashkelon Prison in southern Israel upon a request by the Jordanian authorities.

AJC holds memorial service in honour of King Hussein

AMMAN (J.T.) — The American Jewish Committee on Monday evening held a memorial service in Washington, D.C. to honour His Majesty the late King Hussein for his vision as a leader, his leadership as a statesman and his contribution to Middle East peace.

The AJC is a mainstream American Jewish organisation that supports the Middle East peace process.

Speaking at the ceremony, Jordan's Ambassador to the United States Marwan Muasher said King Hussein's true legacy is in leaving behind a country he built from scratch, one which is considered today among the most open and enlightened societies in the Middle East.

"Because of King Hussein, Jordan today, a country of 4.6 million people, and few natural resources, boasts an open system of political pluralism, an independent parliament, one of the freest press in the Arab World, a

human rights record unmatched in the area, a well-managed economy, a

'He ruled, he led, but he also communicated and listened'

— Muasher

highly educated population and a quality of life that is attested to by all who visit," Muasher said.

"His popularity was never demanded or coerced. It rather came as a natural response to the humility, modesty, affection and respect with which he always treated Jordanians.

He ruled, he led, but he also communicated and listened," the ambassador said.

He added that parallel to that, King Hussein pursued a policy of peace that did not stop with the ending of the state of war but one that proactively attempts to foster cooperation among all peoples of the region.

Dennis Ross, U.S. special coordinator for the peace process, spoke of some of the most moving and poignant times he had shared with King Hussein during the Middle East peace process, most recently at the Wye Plantation.

Without a prepared text, Ross spoke of the late King's "moral authority" which was brought into the Wye talks when King Hussein reminded the Palestinian and Israeli leaders of their responsibilities towards their respective future generations.

Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Zalman Shoval also addressed the audience, as

did representatives from the American Jewish Committee, who recently visited Jordan and had met with His Majesty King Abdullah.

Jason Isaacson, director of government and international affairs at the AJC, spoke of King Abdullah's commitment to the late King Hussein's vision and said that the AJC delegation which had met with King Abdullah in Amman earlier this month was reassured about Jordan's commitment to peace.

Ambassador Muasher also noted that with hardly 40 days in power, it has become evident that King Abdullah is "schooling in his father's tradition," and like his father, King Abdullah is seen as a unifier and a populist.

"King Abdullah thus brings not only stability to Jordan but also continuity of His Majesty King Hussein's vision for the future of the entire region," Muasher said.

Paraguay vice president assassinated, plunging country into turmoil

ASUNCION (AFP) — Vice President Luis María Argana, a bitter rival of Paraguay's president, was killed early Tuesday by gunmen in military uniform, plunging the South American nation into turmoil.

Police said at least four men wearing military camouflage uniforms opened fire with a shotgun and an M-16 rifle as the vice president was going to his office in the capital shortly after 8:00 a.m. (1200 GMT).

Witnesses told police that the attackers launched the assault after blocking Argana's Nissan Patrol with their vehicle. The gunmen reportedly set fire to their Fiat Tempra a short distance away before resuming their flight in another car.

"He was shot three or four times in the heart, the side and the legs," political ally Icho Planas told local radio.

President Raul Cubas ordered the nation's borders sealed but stopped short of declaring martial law.

At Asuncion's request, Argentina moved to close its border with Paraguay. Argentine Vice President Carlos Ruckauf said Tuesday.

Cubas said Brazil also had pledged to close its border with Paraguay.

Paraguay's civil aviation authorities told AFP that airplanes were barred from entering or leaving the country "until further notice."

There were conflicting radio reports on the condition of the Argana's driver and bodyguard. One bulletin said both had died in the attack. Another said the bodyguard, Francisco

Barrios, was "brain dead" and the driver, Victor Raul Barrios, was seriously injured.

The vice president's supporters and the president's opponents immediately pointed fingers at Cubas and his close ally, populist retired general Lino Oviedo.

Former Paraguayan President Juan Carlos Wasmosy, who handed power to Cubas in August last year, read a statement to reporters blaming Cubas for the killing.

"The person responsible for the period of chaos, violence and bloodshed that Paraguay is undergoing is the head of the executive branch," said Wasmosy, accused by Cubas last month of conspiring with Argana to oust him from office.

Juan Carlos Galaverna, one of the slain official's chief aides, demanded the "immediate resignation" of Cubas and the arrest of Oviedo.

Nicanor Duarte, a member of the ruling but deeply divided Colorado Party, said Cubas and Oviedo were guilty of introducing "terror" in Paraguay.

As news of the killing spread in the capital, Argana's supporters smashed car windows and beat ruling party or opposition officials as they tried to enter the American hospital where the vice president was taken.

Activity in Asuncion's downtown slowed at the start of a three-day period of national mourning.

Stores shuttered their doors, schools and colleges cancelled

classes and a union announced a work stoppage to protest the killing.

Cubas is at the centre of a controversy surrounding the fate of Oviedo. The retired general was sentenced to 10 years in prison for leading a failed coup attempt in 1996 against then-president Juan Carlos Wasmosy.

Cubas — Oviedo's protégé — commuted the general's sentence after taking office in August 1998, to the fury of Congress and the opposition.

Last month Cubas accused the Paraguayan congress of seeking to topple him and make Argana the president of this central South American nation of 5.3 million.

Cubas had been Oviedo's running mate in the May 1998 presidential elections but took the top slot when the former army chief's candidacy was banned due to his conviction.

Speaking to reporters in the wake of the killing Tuesday, Cubas said he regretted that Argana, 66, had turned down the government's offer of a bulletproof vehicle.

"He declined to accept and unfortunately the tragedy occurred," Cubas said. "He preferred to provide for his own security."

Cubas said his "conscience" was untroubled by accusations that he and Oviedo were behind Argana's death.

"I find it deplorable that any political group would use this tragedy to gain an advantage," he said.

Oviedo was unavailable for comment.



Indonesian soldiers board a military plane on their way to violence-ridden West Kalimantan province on the island of Borneo. An additional 1,000 troops were flown from the capital to help curb ongoing ethnic violence in West Kalimantan which has left 165 killed and thousands of refugees fleeing the conflict areas (AFP photo)

Indonesian soldiers fire in the air to disperse mobs

SIMPANG MONTERADO, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesian soldiers fired shots in the air on Tuesday to scare off fighters armed with spears, swords and homemade guns who tried to attack victims of ethnic violence on the island of Borneo.

Hundreds of ethnic Dayak men demanded that the troops hand over terrified immigrants from the island of Madura who have been the target of a week of slaughter. At least 200 people have died in an Indonesian region of western Borneo.

Soldiers with automatic rifles fired volleys of gunshots to disperse the mobs in the village of Simpang Monterado, and drove off in a convoy of trucks with a dozen Madurese sheltered underneath a tarpaulin.

There were no reports of injuries. Troops detained some Dayak fighters, but released them after confiscating their weapons.

The Indonesian military presence in the troubled region is slight even though C-130 transport planes ferried hundreds of troops to

Pontianak, a nearby provincial capital, on Tuesday.

Soldiers are outnumbered and have no control in dozens of villages where indigenous Dayak and Malay men patrol on motorcycles and in trucks.

With the reinforcements, there are now about 3,000 troops in Sambas district, where 900,000 people live, 10 per cent of them Madurese.

The violence has been marked by ritual savagery: in some areas, gangs of fighters who had set Madurese homes on fire could be seen parading through the streets carrying the heads of their victims.

Reporters travelling near Simpang Monterado saw three heads lying in the road on Tuesday. Nearby were two bodies, their lives and hearts cut out. No soldiers or police were in sight.

On Monday night, at least one man was injured when soldiers fired shots to clear the road of mobs who tried to block trucks carrying refugees to safety from Singkawang town. Thousands of Madurese have fled their homes and are staying in government compounds and sports stadiums.

The Madurese, resentful by the government to reduce overpopulation on some other islands, are resented by indigenous people who view them as troublemakers who have taken away land and jobs.

An editorial in Tuesday's Jakarta Post said the latest outbreaks of communal violence in Indonesia could jeopardise the country's chances of holding a national election in June. Many see the vote as a potential breakthrough in the country's moves toward democracy after the resignation of authoritarian President Suharto last year.

Recently, about 200 people were killed during weeks of clashes between Muslims and Christians on Ambon island in eastern Indonesia. Fighting also has flared between rival groups in East Timor since the government offered to hold a referendum on the territory's future.

In Jakarta, 300 students protested peacefully in front of the defence ministry on Tuesday to urge the military to stop the communal violence in Indonesia.

Dumas steps aside in corruption probe

PARIS (AFP) — Roland Dumas, a former foreign minister who now heads France's prestigious Constitutional Council, Tuesday stepped aside to take a temporary leave of absence amid a slew of corruption allegations.

As head of the body, which is the watchdog of the French Constitution, the 76-year-old Dumas is the fifth-ranking official in the state hierarchy.

Calls have been mounting for his resignation in the last few days following allegations by his former mistress of his involvement in corruption practised in the late 1980s by the giant Elf-Aquitaine oil group.

He told AFP he was taking "leave of absence" from the presidency of the council and would be replaced in the interim by one of the nine other members, Yves Guena.

Pressure on Dumas to resign has increased since early this month, when his ex-mistress, Christine Deviers-Joncours, incriminated him for the first time in a judicial probe into fraud at Elf, that was launched in 1997.

Her liaison with Dumas took place during his second term as foreign minister from 1988 to 1993 under the late Socialist President Francois Mitterrand. She was employed by Elf-Aquitaine during that period as a lobbyist.

Investigating magistrates have tried to establish whether or not he helped have her hired by Elf and whether he personally benefited from the company's financial largesse.

Three weeks ago, the 50-year-old Deviers-Joncours denied previous statements and claimed she purchased antique Greek statues for

Dumas with cash provided by Elf-Aquitaine.

She also said he had pledged in 1989 to find her a job with the then state-owned oil conglomerate.

Then last week she dropped a new bombshell by telling investigators that a 17-million-franc (almost \$3 million) apartment she bought in a top Paris neighbourhood was in fact a gift from the oil conglomerate for Dumas.

She said the apartment was purchased to thank Dumas for backing the nomination of Loik le Floch-Prigent as head of Elf in July 1989.

She also alleged that Dumas helped her "launder" some of the 45 million francs in commissions she pocketed in 1992 from the oil giant, and revealed the whereabouts of 22 million francs that evaporated from Elf's coffers.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Albania protests to Yugoslavia at border incidents

TIRANA (R) — Albania protested to Yugoslavia on Tuesday over what it said were continued violations of its northern border, saying the incidents endangered the stability of the two countries. "The Foreign Ministry of Albania once again protests strongly against the repetition of incidents caused by the Yugoslav side... directed... against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the republic of Albania," a ministerial statement said. "These actions have grave consequences for stability on the border between the two countries and beyond," it added. Albanian newspapers have reported that Yugoslav border guards exchanged small-arms and machine-gun fire for two hours on Saturday with Albanian shepherds and police. The Tirana government said it was following closely the situation in Kosovo, 90 per cent of whose two million people are ethnic Albanian, and was taking measures to strengthen the army. "The government calls on all Albanians irrespective of their political ideas to be ready to face this situation with determination and cold blood in the interest of the fatherland and the nation," a government statement said. The government criticised Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for refusing to sign the Kosovo peace deal to which the province's ethnic Albanians have agreed. Albania asked envoys of NATO countries for military and humanitarian aid on Sunday, saying it feared Serbia would step up its border provocations to draw Albania into the Kosovo conflict.

Malaysian health officials still baffled by virus

KUALA LUMPUR (AP) — Malaysian health authorities were conducting tests Tuesday to determine the cause of death in 38 of the 56 fatalities during an outbreak of Japanese encephalitis, the national news agency said. Director General of Health Abu Bakar Suleiman said of the 154 patients still in hospital, 42 were confirmed cases of encephalitis, the Bernama news agency reported. It was not known whether the others had Japanese encephalitis or another virus, called hendra. The health ministry has warned that the hendra virus can be transmitted through direct contact with infected pigs. Malaysian health officials have sought the assistance of U.S. and Australian experts to determine the cause of the disease that began killing people in October. Of all the fatalities, 41 were in the Negri Sembilan, a prosperous pig-farming state about 100 kilometres southeast of Kuala Lumpur. Abu Bakar said. Policemen and soldiers have killed thousands of pigs in the area since Saturday in an effort to contain the disease. Authorities plan to exterminate more than 300,000 pigs. The Japanese encephalitis virus, which attack the brain and causes high fever, vomiting and coma, is transmitted from pigs to humans by the culex mosquito. Little is known about hendra, the virus that was first reported in 1994 in Hendra, Australia. Three people who worked with horses got sick with encephalitis, or inflammation of the brain, and two of them died during that outbreak, which was traced to fruit bats. It has never been reported in pigs. The hendra virus is not airborne. It is transmitted through close contact with animals' fluids, such as urine, and cannot be spread from person to person.

Angolan army claims capture of key town in southwest

LUANDA (AFP) — Government forces in Angola claimed Tuesday to have retaken from UNITA rebels a strategically important town in the southwest of the country. The town, Chongoroi, lies some 500 kilometres southeast of Luanda, on a road linking the industrial and agricultural province of Huila with the coastal town of Benguela. The army gave no details of casualties of its own men nor of the rebels of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Since November, the national army has been fighting to "neutralise" UNITA, whose forces are deployed in rural areas across most of the southern African country. Government forces control all provincial capitals. In early February, government forces tried to take three UNITA strongholds, including their key central towns of Andulo and Bailondo, with Mungo, but were repelled. However, the army claims to have taken another UNITA base in Nhareya, in the centre of the country.

Japanese men scramble for Viagra

TOKYO (AFP) — Japanese men scrambled for the anti-impotence drug Viagra after its official release here Tuesday but had to go away dejected when told they needed prescriptions. The diamond-shaped Viagra pills were approved in January for sale from March 23 to allow time for information about the drug to be distributed to doctors and hospitals. "We haven't had any Viagra prescriptions come in," said one Tokyo pharmacist who asked not to be named. "We got several phone calls asking whether we have Viagra. Of course we store Viagra but we can't sell them without a prescription so we advise them to see their doctors first," he added. A spokesman for Viagra manufacturer Pfizer Pharmaceuticals Inc. said the company had been holding meetings for doctors and opinion makers in Japan since the start of February. "We hope Viagra will be a godsend for men who are suffering erectile dysfunction in silence," he said. One doctor in Tokyo noted media reports about people buying Viagra over the Internet, warning that the practice was "very dangerous." The approval for Viagra in just six months triggered an angry reaction in a country where women are still waiting for the contraceptive pill. Health officials meeting March 7 failed to make a final decision on the female contraceptive. The pharmaceutical committee will hold another meeting in June to officially announce its recommendation to Health and Welfare Minister Sohei Miyashita that the pill go on sale. Women's groups said the decision to delay yet again a final recommendation on the use of the pill, reportedly because of problems about prescription instructions, reflected a lack of concern. In 1997 there were 337,799 abortions, according to the health ministry.

Chilean military craft awaits Pinochet in Britain

LONDON (AFP) — A Boeing 707 dispatched by the Chilean air force arrived at a British military base on Tuesday where it will remain on standby to whisk home former dictator Augusto Pinochet if he is let free. The Law Lords, Britain's highest court, is due to rule Wednesday on whether the former Chilean dictator has sovereign immunity against an extradition warrant from Spain. If the judges rule that Pinochet's immunity as a former head of state protects him from the extradition request he would be free to leave Britain. If not Pinochet could face lengthy legal proceedings in Britain and Spain. The 83-year-old has been detained in Britain since Oct. 16 on a Spanish arrest warrant charging him with murder, torture and hostage-taking during his bloody 1973-1990 dictatorship. The plane, which landed at Brize Norton military base, is the third in five months sent to Britain by the Chilean military in hopes of transporting the former general back to Chile.



Paraguayan police stand Tuesday beside the bullet-riddled vehicle in which Paraguayan Vice President Luis María Argana was assassinated earlier in the day, in Asuncion (AFP photo)

Taiwan cautions Vatican on China's 'hypocrisy'

TAIPEI (R) — Taiwan, fearful of a Vatican switch to ties with China, on Tuesday urged the Holy See to reject Beijing's "hypocrisy" and said links with the Communist giant would not promote Chinese religious liberty.

"We fear the Vatican's wishful expectations will not benefit religious freedom in mainland China in any way," foreign ministry spokesman Roy Wu said at a news conference.

"There is no sign that the Chinese Communists will loosen religious freedom," Wu added. "All countries, including the Vatican, should recognise this fact and not be fooled by the Chinese communists' hypocrisy."

Vatican Foreign Minister Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, holding out the Vatican's latest olive branch to Beijing, said on Monday the Holy See was willing to rethink its relations with Taipei to make way for establishing ties with Beijing.

The Vatican is one of just 28 allies recognising Taiwan's nationalist-ruled Republic of China instead of the Communist People's Republic of China.

Tauran said the Vatican would not interfere in China's internal relations if ties were forged, a key Chinese demand.

Tauran made the comments as Chinese President Jiang Zemin made an official visit to Italy, though Jiang was not expected to have any public contacts with the Vatican.

Taiwan has been bracing for a possible shift. Foreign Minister Jason Hu has said Taiwan's Vatican ties appeared firm for the time being, but acknowledged the Holy See's desire for official relations with Beijing.

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano has said the Holy See was willing to "move its embassy back to Beijing, but tonight — if Beijing allowed it."

The nationalist government has clung to sovereignty on Taiwan since losing the mainland to Communist forces in 1949 and has long counted the Catholic church among its closest friends.

A flourishing democracy where religious belief and organised worship are unfettered, Taiwan counts only 370,000 Catholics among its population of 22 million.

Some officials privately acknowledge that a Vatican shift to Beijing would have only limited impact on Taiwan's estrangement from international diplomacy, but said the number of states recognising Taipei still had symbolic significance.

"We face a very difficult

situation in the international community. We must pay great attention to all of our allies," a foreign ministry official, who declined to be identified, was quoted as telling the state-funded central news agency.

"Having the Vatican as our ally is still very significant and we will not give up easily," the official said.

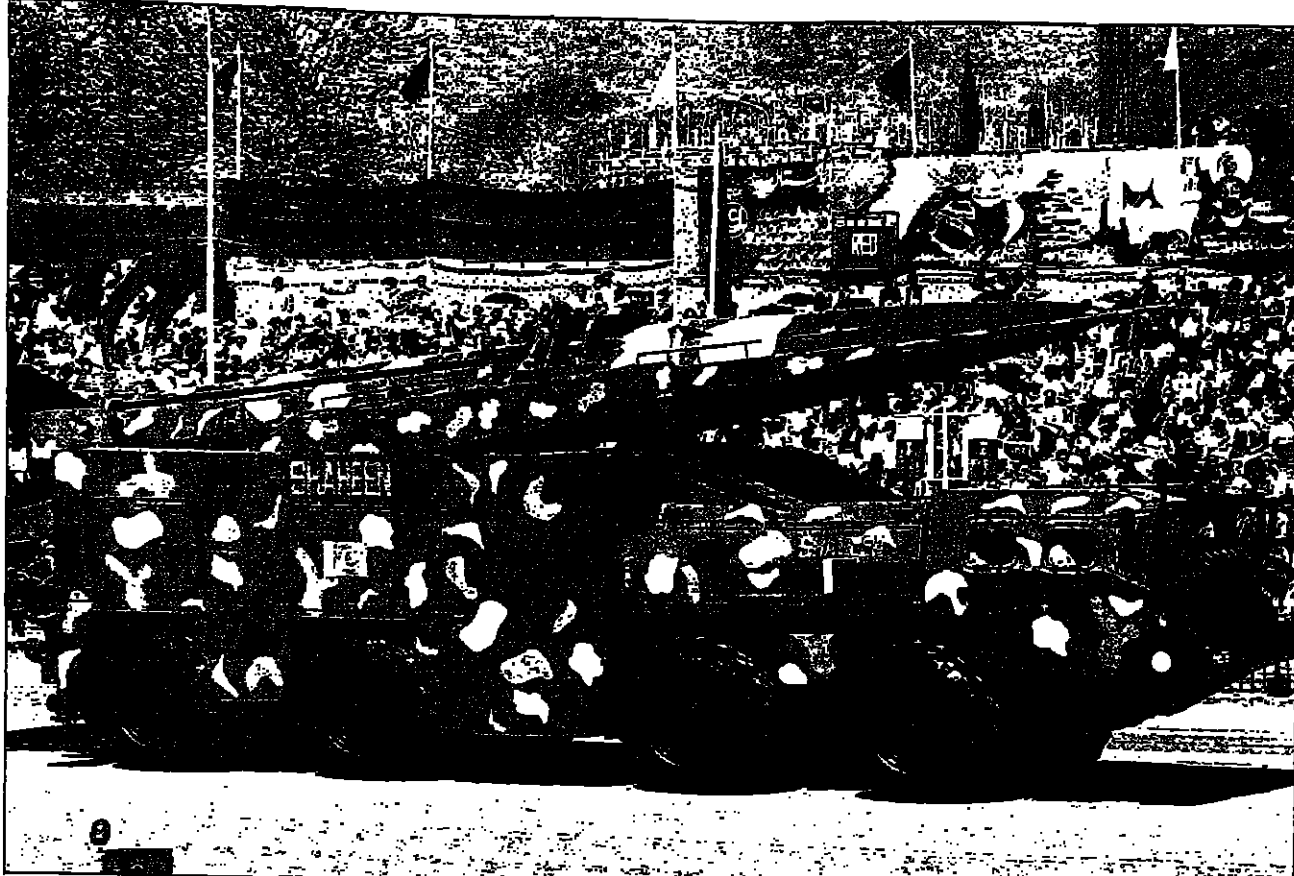
The Vatican has stayed aloof from officially atheist Beijing because of restrictions obliging Chinese Catholics to worship in a state-sanctioned church that has no ties to the Pope.

Catholic clerics say there are some four million members of the "official" mainland church but as many as eight million others who worship underground and recognise the Pope.

Beijing sees the Vatican's desire to have a free hand in appointing bishops as interference in its internal affairs, but Tauran said this was a matter of religion and not politics.

Tauran recalled that the Vatican's Beijing embassy was forced to shut down in 1951. It eventually reopened in Taipei.

In 1972, a year after Taipei lost its United Nations seat to Beijing, the Vatican downgraded its Taiwan ties by not replacing a departing ambassador, leaving only a charge d'affaires.



A Pakistan-made surface-to-surface Shaheen missile passes spectators during a military parade on Pakistan Day. Pakistan put on display for the first time its powerful Ghauri missile, with a range of 1,500 km, and Shaheen missiles, at the parade. The Shaheen (Eagle) has a range of 700 kms (AFP photo)

Pakistan displays newest weaponry, including missiles

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's new nuclear capable missiles rumbled down the wide boulevards of the federal capital Tuesday at a military parade to herald the 59th anniversary of a resolution that led to the nation's creation.

Pakistan's newest, and as yet untested missile called the Shaheen, was displayed alongside the Ghauri missile. Both missiles are able to strike deep within its uneasy neighbour India, against whom Pakistan has fought two wars.

Lauding Pakistan's scientists for enabling the country to explode a nuclear device last year and declare itself a nuclear power, President Rafiq Tarar announced a new survival award specifically for them.

"After conducting the nuclear tests our defences have become invincible," said Tarar. "We have become an impregnable nation."

He also issued a stern warning to Pakistan's enemies: "Our enemies cannot even look at us with evil intention in their heart... We will gouge out any evil eye cast towards our country."

Although he didn't mention India by name, Pakistan has had an uneasy relationship with its larger neighbour since the South Asian subcontinent gained its independence from Britain in 1947.

Since then Pakistan and India have fought three wars. After last year's tit-for-tat underground nuclear explosions, many international leaders expressed fears that a

fourth confrontation could escalate into a nuclear war.

Annually Pakistan displays its latest weaponry at the national day parade, which commemorates a 1940 resolution that led to the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent.

While Pakistan says it doesn't want to embark on a nuclear arms race in the region, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz on Monday warned that Pakistan would not be left behind if India developed nuclear weapons.

Tarar told the spectators at the parade that a settlement to the outstanding Kashmir dispute is the only guarantee of peace in the region.

Pakistan and India both lay claim to a united Kashmir, divided between the two

countries after independence.

For the past decade the majority Hindu India has been battling a violent secessionist uprising in its only Muslim dominated state of Jammu and Kashmir.

India accuses Pakistan of fomenting violence on its territory, a charge Islamabad denies but says it is sympathetic to the secessionists, who are demanding either outright independence or union with Islamic Pakistan.

"We want the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute," said Tarar. "The solution of this problem is necessary for our survival... I want to make it clear that our desire for peace should not be misconstrued as our weakness."

'U.N. and Cambodia strike deal on trial for Khmer Rouge'

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — The United Nations and the Cambodian government on Tuesday agreed to hold a domestic trial of "international standards" for leaders of the Khmer Rouge, a senior Cambodian official announced.

After discussions with U.N. rights envoy Thomas Hammarberg, Secretary of State for Information Khieu Kanharith said, however, that "a very long debate" on various formulas was expected before any trial began.

"It seems that we have come closer to having a Khmer Rouge trial in Cambodia," he told reporters.

Khieu Kanharith said initial divisions had centred on his government's determination to hold legal proceedings on home soil, and recommendations by a team of U.N. experts for an international trial.

However, he said a compromise of a trial in Cambodia but "international in character" — as suggested by U.N. chief Kofi Annan — was an acceptable option.

"We can probably accept that kind of trial but I have asked Mr. Hammarberg to present options and formulas and ways in which international experts can help," he said.

"Now we have to study the form of the participation by international experts," he said, anticipating "a very long debate" and complex constitutional and legal alterations.

U.N. rights envoy Hammarberg said last week the U.N. was willing to help Cambodia in staging a Khmer Rouge trial, but warned that few countries would support a process held in existing judicial structures that would be a

"sham."

Hammarberg, the U.N. experts' report released earlier this month and human rights groups have described Cambodia's judiciary as inadequate to host a fair trial for leaders of the 1975-1979 genocide.

With Prime Minister Hun Sen rejecting a trial abroad, U.N. officials are now considering assisting a trial inside Cambodia but with the U.N. exercising paramount control of court proceedings, diplomatic sources said.

However, one key area of concern is that the only Khmer Rouge leader facing trial is Pol Pot's former chief of staff Ta Mok, captured earlier this month. Fellow ageing leaders live in peaceful retirement following their defections.

These include Pol Pot's ideological guru Nuon Chea and

the movement's public face Khieu Samphan — who defected in December — and number three Ieng Sary, who split from the rebels in 1996.

The architects of Pol Pot's ultra-Maoist "Killing Fields" nightmare are held responsible for the deaths of up to two million people through torture, overwork, starvation or execution.

Hammarberg is due to meet Premier Hun Sen on Thursday for what is expected to be more hard bargaining aimed at maintaining an international hand in a trial for the Khmer Rouge.

Although legal proceedings against Ta Mok have started and the government has pledged a trial within six months, he has yet to find a lawyer and remains in a Phnom Penh military jail.

Pol Pot himself died in April 1998.

Japan says North Korea missile launch unlikely soon

TOKYO (R) — Japanese Defence Minister Hoshi Norota said on Tuesday that North Korea was unlikely to launch a ballistic missile for at least the next three months, Japanese media reported.

"There are no signs (in North Korea) that cranes have been deployed or trucks have gathered. It takes at least three months to gather such equipment," Norota was quoted by Jiji news agency as saying.

Norota was speaking in a parliamentary committee where opposition parties were questioning a statement made by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi on Monday.

Obuchi said it was "impossible" that North Korea would stage a repeat of its firing of a missile over Japan last year. He backed down slightly on Tuesday, however, telling

reporters: "I am hoping that North Korea will not launch another missile over Japan. It's not that I went to North Korea to check."

His top aide also reiterated Japan's worries about Pyongyang's plans, saying Tokyo needed to see some signs of cooperation from North Korea on missiles and other issues.

"For Japan, it's not just the taepo dong (missile), but various issues we have raised (with Pyongyang)," chief Cabinet Secretary Hiromu Nonaka told reporters. "We want to see some sincerity in the responses from North Korea. We're hoping that the right environment for that is being built."

Obuchi's remarks on the prospects of another missile launch came in the wake of a

shift in Japan's North Korean policy during his weekend trip to Seoul.

On Saturday, Obuchi pledged Tokyo's full support for South Korea's "sunshine policy" of engagement with the reclusive and unpredictable Stalinist state.

Japan, which regards North Korea as its main security threat, had maintained a hard-line stance towards Pyongyang since last August when the three-stage ballistic missile passed over Japan and landed in the Pacific Ocean.

In the wake of the test-firing, a shocked Tokyo broke off talks on restoring ties with Pyongyang, froze food aid to the famine-hit country and pointed out its right to carry out a pre-emptive military strike against any "enemy" planning an attack on Japan.

But on Saturday, Obuchi urged Pyongyang to open a dialogue with Japan and capitalist South Korea to ensure peace in Asia, adding that Japan was ready to improve bilateral ties on condition that Pyongyang ally Tokyo's concerns.

On Monday, the United States pledged more than 200,000 metric tonnes of new food aid and seed potatoes to North Korea where officials said famine remains a "dire" problem.

Although the State Department said there was no link between food aid and politics, the announcement of over \$60 million worth of aid came just five days after Washington settled a nuclear dispute with Pyongyang that had threatened a new crisis on the Korean peninsula.

Jiang pressed by Italian leaders over rights

ROME (AFP) — Chinese President Jiang Zemin faced new protests by human rights militants and appeals from Italian politicians Tuesday as he continued a 10-day trip to Europe. The 72-year-old leader was hoping to escape the pressure over rights and get down to the business of drumming up trade when he travelled to Italy's economic capital, Milan, later in the day.

But in Rome the pressure continued, after Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro broke the official silence on the subject of human rights at a state banquet in Jiang's honour Monday evening.

"The open nature of our relationship allows me to express the wish that new and more rapid progress be made... in all the areas which affect the notion of democracy," he said.

"We are talking about the

most serious commitment which weighs on our conscience as political leaders, and furthermore on our conscience as men," he added.

Then on Tuesday morning a new small demonstration was held outside Rome City, where Jiang met the mayor of Rome. Three similarly modest but vocal protests were held Monday.

"Free Tibet" and "Communist assassins" chanted some 20 protesters who hoisted a banner on the square in front of the City Hall as Jiang arrived for talks with Mayor Francesco Rutelli.

To make matters worse, Rutelli also raised the rights issue in talks, broaching the thorny issue of Beijing's relations with the Vatican, frozen for more decades in a rift linked with the Holy See's recognition of Taiwan.

"I would like an announce-

ment could be made in Rome... on ways of finding solutions for religious freedoms," the Rome mayor said in a declaration.

Roman Catholics in China are split between the "official" church, which is recognised by the state and has four million followers, and the clandestine church, with 10 million followers, outlawed by Beijing but recognised by Rome.

Chinese officials rebuffed Monday an offer by the Vatican to discuss ways of resolving the rift. The Vatican and Macedonia are the only European entities that have diplomatic relations with Taipei.

The officials' comments came after a press report earlier this month that China and the Vatican had reached a breakthrough in normalising relations. China denied any agreement had been made.

Jiang held talks with the head of the Italian employers' body, Giorgio Fossà, Monday morning, ahead of a lunchtime meeting with ex-Communist Premier Massimo d'Alema.

A Chinese spokesman insisted that criticism of Beijing's record was unjustified.

"China attributes a great deal of importance to human rights, but implementation of human rights must take into consideration the realities of each country," he said Monday.

Italian officials are playing down the protests here, although security is tight.

"We are a country of free speech. Of course people can say what they want here," Carlo Bruni, Rome's ambassador to Beijing who is accompanying Jiang on the Italian leg of the trip, told AFP.

Chinese dissidents slam EU decision not to back human rights censure

BEIJING (AFP) — Chinese dissidents Tuesday lashed out at a decision by the European Union not to sponsor a United Nations resolution condemning Beijing's human rights record.

"Regardless of the country, if human rights are violated that must be condemned," said Qin Qingguo, whose son, Qin Yongmin, was sentenced to 12 years in prison in December after attempting to set up the opposition China Democracy Party (CDP).

"As soon as China signed the two international covenants, they launched a crackdown on dissent rendering the signing meaningless," he told AFP from his home in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

Despite signing two international covenants on economic, social and cultural and civil and political rights in the past year, China has not yet ratified the accords.

The EU on Monday backed away from a showdown with China when the bloc's foreign ministers decided not to support the resolution censuring Beijing.

The authorities in Beijing welcomed the decision.

"This decision is conducive to the speeding up of dialogue and cooperation between the two sides in the human rights field and will further the development of China and EU relations," said foreign ministry spokesman Sun Yuxi.

"We have always been of the view that the correct way to patch up different views of various countries on the question of human rights is to conduct dialogue and cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual respect," he said.

The move came as a blow for international rights agencies, who have urged both the European Union and the United States to take a stronger line with China in the wake of a crackdown on dissidents.

Campaigners have also been pressing for action in the run-up to June's 10th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre of pro-democracy protesters.

The EU decision came on the opening day of the U.N.'s annual Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva.

"With this decision the EU blatantly mistakes taken gestures... for a genuine effort at improving China's human rights situation," the New York-based Human Rights in China (HRIC) said in a statement.

"We are witnessing the harshest crackdown in China since 1989," HRIC director Xiao Qiang said.

"It is time to go beyond expressing concern to taking action."

China had released six pro-democracy activists in the weeks running up to the meeting.

On March 17, Beijing released Chen Zhongde who had been detained last month with several members of the banned pro-democracy party for attempting to organise a national congress in Wuhan.

The CDP is the first group to challenge the Communist Party's 50-year rule of China by seeking official recognition as a political party.

In December, three of its leading activists — including Qin Yongmin — were sentenced to up to 13 years jail for

subversion.

The Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China said last week Qin had been found to be suffering from serious abdominal pains and a swollen face during a family visit.

The group said Qin suffered from heart problems, high blood pressure and stomach ailments before he was sentenced.

But not all of China's political activists were disappointed with the EU move.

"The international community cannot press China too much because it will just make the government take harsher action on dissent," Gao Hongming, a Beijing-based dissident, told AFP, adding he hoped a censure motion would not be passed by the U.N.

"At the present stage it's very difficult to pass such a resolution because the EU and the U.N. are always giving priority to economic and trade issues over human rights," he added.

N. Korean embassy frees hostage in Thailand

BANGKOK (R) — North Korea's embassy in Bangkok on Tuesday freed the kidnapped son of one of its own former envoys, ending a diplomatic stand-off, officials said.

"He was in a motorcade that has just left the embassy," Ong-Art Klampaiboon, the personal secretary to Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, told Reuters on Tuesday afternoon.

A Reuters photographer saw three cars with passengers leave the embassy. The cars headed for the Thai foreign ministry, Ong-Art said.

Police said the motorcade contained Hong Won-Myong, 19, son of North Korean diplomat Hong Sun Gyong.

Hours earlier, Thailand declared six diplomats from Communist North Korea persona non grata for suspected involvement in a bungled attempt to kidnap the former North Korean councillor.

It ordered the six to be deported within 72 hours.

Hong and his family disappeared from the embassy on Feb. 19 in an attempt to defect but were later caught by their North Korean pursuers and put in a van headed for neighbouring Laos.

Hong Sun Gyong had formally applied for political asylum to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees in Thailand.

On March 10, the van overturned on a highway in Nakorn Raichasima about 240 km northeast of Bangkok, and Hong and his wife were rescued by passers-by and escaped.

But his son, who was in another car, was held hostage by his North Korean abductors, prompting protracted negotiations and a war of words between the two countries.

Thailand demanded an apology from North Korea for the incident on Thai soil and sought the release of the young Hong.

This prompted North Korea to send Ri Do Sop, chief of its foreign ministry's protocol division and former ambassador to Bangkok, to convey his government's regrets and to try to resolve the row.

Ong-Art, the Thai foreign minister's aide, said earlier on Tuesday that the North Korean mission had agreed to release the boy because they feared ties with Thailand would suffer.

Thai officials said the six North Korean diplomats would still have to leave the country despite the young man's release.

Police have said they believe 10 North Koreans — four of them from abroad and six Bangkok-based diplomats — were involved in the failed kidnapping attempt.

The North Korean embassy had accused councillor Hong of embezzling money intended for rice purchases.

Ong-Art said the young Hong and his parents would remain in Thailand under government protection pending the granting of political asylum in an unidentified third country.

Farmer who killed black baby sentenced in South Africa case

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — In a case that ignited protests of racism, a white farmer convicted of culpable homicide for fatally shooting a black infant received a five-year suspended sentence Tuesday.

As police escorted Nicholas Steyn away in an armoured vehicle, scores of blacks protested outside the courthouse. Shouts of "Kill the farmer! Kill the Boer!" were heard inside the building in Delmas, a town just east of Johannesburg. Boer was a reference to Afrikaners, the descendants of Dutch colonists.

"Given the facts, the decision is not a fair one," said Desley Fortuin, a local African National Congress official. "I would have liked to see between five and 10 years."

Fortuin said the family would appeal.

Judge Tjibbe Spoelstra placed Steyn on probation for three years as a condition of the suspended sentence, police inspector S.J. Miller said.

Steyn, 42, was convicted March 4 for the death of 6-month-old Angelina Zwane. He had been charged with murder and attempted murder for firing shots at three black children,

one of them carrying the baby, crossing a family's field near Benoni, also near Johannesburg.

A bullet struck Angelina and then lodged in the back of the infant's cousin, 11-year-old Francina Dlamini.

Steyn said he fired as a warning and that the shooting was a mistake, and claimed South African news media distorted what happened. A forensic expert testifying for Steyn said the bullet that struck Angelina had ricocheted off a telephone pole.

The April 1998 incident inflamed passions in South Africa, and crowds of black protesters gathered outside the courthouse during hearings in the case.

President Nelson Mandela and other black leaders visited the crime scene and the family of the slain infant. They said the shooting showed racism still existed years after South Africa's first all-race election in 1994.

Spokesman Parks Mankahlana said Mandela would not discuss the sentence.

"The law has taken its course. If the president were to comment on each and every conviction or acquittal in this country, he would do nothing else."

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Pushing for human rights

THE U.N. Human Rights Commission has just commenced its annual six-week session in Geneva amidst calls to make international deliberations on human rights violations more effective. The 53-member commission is the highest U.N. body on human rights, but its yearly meetings have barely made a dent on human rights abuses worldwide. Besides the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities there are no less than a dozen treaty bodies monitoring the application of human rights standards and toiling to lessen human rights violations. This is not to mention the no less than two-dozen special rapporteurs who are also aiding the commission and the sub-commission on specific country situations, over and above the proliferating thematic human rights issues that the U.N. human rights systems disseminate to special rapporteurs as well report on.

During the cold war era, the commission and most of its auxiliary bodies were literally incapacitated and unable to contribute significantly to the promotion and protection of human rights. In the post-Cold War era, U.N. human rights activities remain essentially rhetorical with little effect if any on human rights situations.

Where the U.N. human rights systems achieved a great deal of good was over the elaboration of several key human rights conventions which succeeded in setting binding standards in a few countries. Still these conventions remained abstract concepts in the rest of the world. Even the establishment of the post of U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights barely succeeded in making a tangible difference on the human rights fronts. There is a consensus that human rights violations, including the gravest, continue unabated despite all U.N. efforts. This suggests that there is something terribly wrong with the way the international community is dealing with human rights violations. The commission's way of condemnation is getting nowhere because quite simply condemnations have no teeth. Unless and until the commission and its subsidiary bodies can exact a price from countries which persist in systematic and gross human rights violations, the weeks-long deliberations by the commission and the other human rights bodies will be forgotten and stored in U.N. records as soon as the meetings are concluded. Perhaps this time the commission could devote some time to how to make itself relevant to the human rights cause. Since its inception in 1948, the commission remained nothing more and nothing less than a mini-U.N. General Assembly unable to change the course of human rights in the world.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Faneh said the former government's economic team decided in principle to float a tender for the licence of another mobile phone company to compete with Fastlink. However, said Faneh, the former chairman of the Jordan Telecommunications Company (JTC) refused this policy and insisted on taking the licence for the JTC. Despite the fact that operating a mobile phone service, would cause estimated losses of JD2 million a year, the JTC decided to go-ahead with its project and look for a strategic partner to provide technical assistance, added Faneh. Fastlink paid JD7 million to the treasury for its operation licence; is the JTC going to compete with the company without paying such an amount, asked the writer, arguing that even if the JTC will pay, the money will go to the treasury anyway because it owns the shares — the government pays itself. Nor will competing with Fastlink be easy because the company has a stable market share, added Faneh.

Al Dostour's Mazen Saket said that although there is no doubt that a general amnesty is required sometimes, it must not demean justice and equality. Fine dodging and forgeries are inexcusable and harm other people's rights, argued Saket. The objectives of the general amnesty, giving opportunities to violators must not create injustice and inequality, the writer warned. Saket said he believes that the government's proposed law on the issue is more accurate in determining positives and negatives than the Lower House of Parliament's draft law. Treating the economic and social reasons behind crimes must be the main objective, he stated.

Washington Watch

We lost the vote, but won the debate

Dr. James J. Zogby

ON MARCH 16 the U.S. Congress passed a resolution (House Concurrent Resolution 24 — H.Con.Res. 24) calling on the president to "unequivocally assert U.S. opposition to the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian State."

For more significant, however, than H.Con.Res. 24 was the historic debate that preceded the vote on the resolution. For the first time in the Halls of Congress there was a substantial debate: on Palestinian rights; on the one-sided unbalanced approach that Congress takes on Palestinian issues; and on the need for new thinking in Middle East policy.

In reality, the resolution, though unbalanced, is meaningless. A year ago when the pro-Israel lobby conceived of this effort, it was to be a resolution that declared blanket U.S. opposition to a Palestinian state.

In its final form, however, H.Con.Res. 24 merely calls on the president to state what he already has stated, i.e. that the United States does not want to see a Palestinian unilateral declaration of statehood. What prompted the outrage of some Members of Congress was the lack of balance in the resolution. Before the actual vote took place, member after member rose to condemn this one-sidedness.

Armed with a clear sense of justice and a letter from the State Department declaring U.S. opposition to all "unilateral acts by any party," the Congressmen took to the floor to state their opposition.

Since a congressional debate of this sort was unprecedented, a number of the comments deserved to be printed:

Congressman Nick Rahall (D-WV): [The resolution] simply fails to mention the other half of the equation. Failure to mention both parties in this resolution is only rhetoric.

Congressman Sam Gejdenson (D-CT): But here in... Congress, we have... people that are harder line than even the Israeli government under Mr. Netanyahu... we continue to deal with the Palestinians not as if they were partners in the peace process but the

same adversaries they were in the past I think is a mistake... For those of us who care about the children and the women who die in marketplace bombings, who worry about the poverty and starvation in camps, we need to move this peace process forward and we need to take opportunities like this one not simply to single out one side, especially at a point in history where there is hope for a comprehensive peace.

Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA): The perception is going to be that we are acting in a biased, unbalanced manner even though our intelligence community... has reported that the Palestinian authority is doing everything it can right now to comply with the Oslo requirements.

Congressman John Dingell (D-MI): What we are doing is rejecting an even-handed, honest broker approach to peace in the Middle East and substituting for that a participation in and inactivity directed at only one side.

Congressman Tom Campbell (R-CA): I intend to vote no because I believe that the people of Palestine are entitled to their own country... But to the child born in a refugee camp who has never known a home except a refugee camp, to the child born in Gaza whose parents go up to work through a chute, as though a cattle chute, every day into Israel, to the resident of the West Bank who cannot carry on the trade with Jordan, I say you have a country; and you have the right to say you do.

Congressman David Bonior (D-MI): It is, I believe, a one-sided resolution that will only set things back... Choosing sides now, and that is what the resolution does... is short-sighted.

Congressman David Obey (D-WI): But do not kid ourselves by saying this is a balanced resolution. It is not. If it were, it would take note of all unilateral actions taken by all parties... including some unilateral actions taken by this very Congress... this Congress should... be fair-minded in noting

the actions on the part of the Israeli government in taking unilateral actions with respect to some settlement activities in the West Bank and in Jerusalem.

Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney (D-GA):

I believe that this resolution sends a dangerous message to all those working and sacrificing for peace in the Middle East. This is, in the end, a politically motivated resolution that... aims to... send a message to Clinton and Arafat in advance of their meeting next week and the upcoming Israeli elections. Its passage will undoubtedly send the WRONG message... it would be far more beneficial to send a message to Israelis and Palestinians and to the entire international community that the United States is committed to remaining an even-handed peace broker in the Middle East... I support peace based on fairness, justice, and security for all peoples of the Middle East.

Even the final vote doesn't tell the entire story. While 380 members voted for the resolution, many of them publicly joined their colleagues in criticizing the bill. Some, like Congresspersons Rodriguez, Pomeroy, and Capps expressed their concerns with the bill as follows:

Congressman Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX): I rise to express my concern over language utilized in H.Con.Res. 24. Although I support the resolution, I feel that Congress did not have an adequate opportunity to move fully discuss all unilateral declarations by any party to the Middle East peace process, including those by the United States.

Congressman Earl Pomeroy (D-ND): I rise to support this resolution expressing congressional opposition to the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state... I am, however, disappointed with the one-sidedness of this resolution.

Congresswoman Lois Capps (D-CA): I rise in support of the resolution. [But] Congress should be on record opposing all unilateral acts, including, but not limited to, a

declaration of Palestinian statehood. What should be noted is that despite a year long campaign by the pro-Israel lobby and an intense last minute effort to pressure members to vote for this meaningless bill, 54 Representatives voted no or refused to vote at all. This, in itself, is a record number of Congressmen to oppose a pro-Israel lobby initiative.

Regardless of the final vote — the events surrounding the passage of H.Con.Res. 24 are a watershed in Congress' handling of Palestinian and Middle East issues. It marked a number of important firsts.

The debate was an important breakthrough. Never before had such courage been shown by so many Members of Congress and never before had the issue of Palestinian rights and U.S. bias toward Israel been publicly debated in Congress.

Equally impressive were the efforts of leading Members of Congress. The International Relations Committee almost succeeded in blocking the bill.

Congressman Sam Gejdenson, a Jewish Member of Congress, who is the ranking Democrat on the committee played a significant role. He first attempted to amend the bill to oppose "unilateral actions of both sides." He spoke forcefully in support of his effort chiding his colleagues for only singling out Palestinians for condemnation. He noted that the Palestinians are the party honouring their commitments to the peace process and then rebuked the committee for taking a "gratuitous hit on the Palestinians" and asked rhetorically why Congress felt so threatened to take a balanced position.

Gejdenson was joined by a leading Republican member of the committee, Tom Campbell, who provided leadership during the entire process.

Campbell criticized the bill for being one-sided and for the damage that it might do to U.S. relations with "our Arab allies."

While Gejdenson's amendment was voted down, Campbell continued to fight and was

able to block passage of the bill, in committee, by use of a parliamentary tactic. A large number of members of the committee simply left the room and refused to reenter thus ensuring that the required number needed for a vote wouldn't be present.

The Republican House leadership had to use a parliamentary tactic of their own to bring the matter to a vote. While this effort virtually guaranteed that H.Con.Res. 24 would pass, they could not stop the historic debate from taking place.

Much of what transpired during these events reminded me of 1988 and f.w., with the leadership of Jesse Jackson, we were able to break the "deadly silence" and debate Palestinian rights during that year's Democratic Presidential Convention.

Much the same happened this year — but in a far more significant setting — the Halls of Congress.

Many members of Congress have indicated that they now feel emboldened to continue the struggle. They feel that even many of their colleagues who voted for H.Con.Res. 24 are now ready to take a more balanced position.

They feel that while we may have lost the vote on H.Con.Res. 24, we won the debate and in the process helped break the chains of fear that have for so long silenced honest congressional debate about the Middle East.

My institute was proud of the role we played in mobilising Arab-Americans to encourage Members of Congress to speak out and then to provide support to those who did. We were joined in this campaign by Americans for Peace Now, an American Jewish peace organisation that supports a just, balanced peace.

H.Con.Res. 24 is a beginning. To maintain momentum we must continue to work to encourage and support those Members of Congress who will speak out, knowing that, if we succeed, the path to peace will be an easier one for all who seek to travel on it.



Looking for a U.S. fig leaf

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — Isn't it ironic that Yasser Arafat should be at the White House on this first day of spring while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is in Moscow?

The Palestinian leader and his top aides see in this reversal of roles a sign of the times and an accomplishment of Palestinian diplomacy. The Israeli leader has not been invited to Washington since last October when the short-lived Wye memorandum was negotiated with much fanfare.

On the surface, Israeli relations with official Washington seem to have been dealt a setback this year. American and Israeli officials have customarily called on each other whenever they were traveling in the United States or the Middle East.

But this was not the recent pattern: Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon came to the United States earlier this year but was reportedly snubbed by the State Department. Defence Secretary William Cohen made a last-minute stopover in Israel after his recent successful swing through the Middle East, amid ambiguous reports about the United States refusing to pass the funds to Israel — \$1.2 billion — authorised under the Wye accord until Israel proceeds with implementing the accord. Even Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Martin Indyk did not go to Israel after his recent call on Syrian President Hafez Assad.

On the other hand, this is Arafat's third encounter with President Bill Clinton, whose wife and daughter are at present touring North African Arab countries — Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Hillary Clinton, it will be recalled, is best admired by Palestinians for her championing of Palestinian statehood — a position that has rankled diehard American Zionists and their counterparts in Israel.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian leader who is often described as the "master of brinkmanship" is on this trip here looking for an American fig leaf. How could he possibly return home without a tangible American commitment to Palestinian statehood or some other American trophy.

Clinton is unlikely to tip the applicant after prominent Arab, European and Asian leaders have called on Arafat to finesse this May 4 deadline when the Oslo peace accord legally expires and negotiate Palestinian statehood later on in the year.

The American president, particularly after his December trip to Gaza, the first by an American head of state to Palestinian lands, is not expected to go much beyond his remarks last week at a White House ceremony when he was given an award by the Yitzhak Rabin Centre. At the South Lawn, he assured his listeners that "as long as Israel takes risk for peace, the United States will do everything in its power to minimise those risks and advance that cause." His audience surprisingly included political rivals of Netanyahu in the upcoming national elections — Yitzhak Mordechai and his wife, along with the wife of the Labour Party leader, Ehud Barak.

Optimists may feel better about his other noteworthy remark about a "hard truth": There would be no security for any in the Middle East without fairness for all, that the time had come to lift people's hopes, not exploit their fears, to reach across the divide of history and hatred, to fulfil the true promise of the Promised Land.

The Clinton administration, as almost any other government, is reluctant to undertake at this time some new stance that might serve as fodder for Netanyahu's forces in the May 17 election, and especially after the two houses of the American Congress voted over-

whelmingly — in non-binding resolutions — against a unilateral Palestinian declaration of independence.

Moreover, the wily Israeli leader has lately reignited the Jerusalem issue, which some believe was instrumental in his last successful bid to the Israeli premiership. This explains his recent confrontation with the European Union over meetings with Palestinian leaders in occupied Arab east Jerusalem, and his belated decision to withdraw the special travel permits of three prominent Palestinian officials, two of whom reside in Jerusalem, who participated in the session at Orient House, the office of the Palestinian National Authority representative in the Holy City.

Saeed Erakat, speaking at the Council on Foreign Relations here a short while before he was due at a Monday evening meeting between President Arafat and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, argued that the issue was not only the timing of the much-discussed Palestinian declaration of independence but how to fill the "legal vacuum" that will be created after May 4.

The Palestinian minister of local government repeatedly underlined the seriousness of the situation within the Palestinian body politic and stressed that the decision that has yet to be taken on the next step will be made by at least three Palestinian institutions.

He also indicated that the American fig leaf that the weakened Arafat and his group of "moderates" would need will be nothing less than an American endorsement of the Palestinians' "right to self-determination" as the United States, he stressed, is among the few countries and some rightwing Israeli groups that have not conceded this point. Additionally, any delay he thought should essentially include a binding time frame and a clear cessation of Israel settlement activities in the occupied territories.

Burgers aren't the real enemies

By Salman Rushdie

A COUPLE of years ago a British literary festival staged a public debate on the motion that "it is the duty of every European to resist American culture." Along with two American journalists, one of whom was Sidney Blumenthal now more famous as a Clinton aide and impeachment witness, I opposed the motion. I am happy to report that we won, capturing roughly 60 per cent of the audience's vote.

But it was an odd sort of victory. My American co-panelists were surprised by the strength of the audience's antipathy to Americanism — after all, 40 per cent of the crowd had voted for the motion. Blumenthal, noting that "American culture" as represented by American armed forces had liberated Europe from Nazism not all that many years ago, was puzzled by the audience's apparent lack of gratitude. And there was a residual feeling that the case for "resistance" was actually pretty strong.

Since that day, the debate about cultural globalisation and its military-political sidekick, intervention, has continued to intensify, and anti-American sentiment is, if anything, on the increase. In most people's heads, globalisation has come to mean the worldwide triumph of Nike, the Gap and MTV. Confusingly, we want these goods and services when we behave as consumers, but with our cultural hats on we have begun to deplore their omnipresence.

On the merits of intervention, even greater confusion reigns. We do not seem to know if we want a world policeman or not. If the "international community," which these days is little more than a euphemism for the United States, fails to intervene promptly in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, it is excoriated for that failure. Elsewhere, it is criticised just as vehemently when it does intervene: when American bombs fall on Iraq, or when American agents assist in the capture of the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Clearly, those of us who shelter under the pax Americana are deeply ambivalent about it, and the United States will no doubt continue to be surprised by the level of the world's ingratitude. The globalising power of American culture is opposed by an improbable alliance that includes everyone from cultural-relativist liberals to hardline fundamentalists, with all manner of pluralists and individualists, to say nothing of flag-waving nationalists and splintering sectarians, in between.

Much ecological concern is presently being expressed about the crisis in biodiversity, the possibility that a fifth or more of the earth's species of living forms may soon become extinct. To some, globalisation is an equivalent social catastrophe, with equally alarm-

ing implications for the survival of true cultural diversity, of the world's precious localness: the Indianness of India, the Frenchness of France.

Amid this din of global defensiveness, little thought is given to some of the most important questions raised by a phenomenon that, like it or not, is not going away any time soon.

For instance: Do cultures actually exist as separate, pure, defensible entities? Is not mélange, adulteration, impurity, pick'n mix at the heart of the idea of the modern, and hasn't it been that way for most of this all-shock-up century? Doesn't the idea of pure cultures, in urgent need of being kept free from alien contamination, lead us inevitably towards apartheid, towards ethnic cleansing, towards the gas chamber?

Or, to put it another way: Are there other universals besides international conglomerates and the interests of superpowers? And if by chance there were a universal value that might, for the sake of argument, be called "freedom," whose enemies — tyranny, bigotry, intolerance, fanaticism — were the enemies of us all; and if this "freedom" were discovered to exist in greater quantity in the countries of the West than anywhere else on earth; and if, in the world as it actually exists, rather than in some unattainable Utopia, the authority of the United States were the best current guarantor of that "freedom," then might it not follow that to oppose the spread of American culture would be to take up arms against the wrong foe?

By agreeing on what we are against, we discover what we are for.

André Malraux believed that the third Millennium must be the age of religion. I would say rather that it must be the age in which we finally grow out of our need for religion. But to cease to believe in our gods is not the same thing as commencing to believe in nothing.

There are fundamental freedoms to fight for, and it will not do to doom the terrorised women of Afghanistan or of the circumcised-happy lands of Africa by calling their oppression their "culture." And of course it is America's duty not to abuse its pre-eminence, and it is our right to criticise such abuses when they happen — when, for example, innocent factories in Sudan are bombed, or Iraqi civilians pointlessly killed.

But perhaps we, too, need to rethink our easy condemnations.

Sneakers, burgers, blue jeans and music videos are not the enemy. If the young people of Iran now insist on rock concerts, who are we to criticise their cultural contamination? Out there are real tyrants to defeat. Let's keep our eyes on the prize.

— The New York Times

Correction

In the article "Businessmen seek to improve competitiveness with Jordan-U.S. Business Partnership" (J.T., March 23, 1999, p. 3), the Jordan Times erroneously reported that the JUSBP programme has an annual budget of \$15 million. In fact, the \$15 million budget will be spread over four years. The Jordan Times regrets the error and any inconvenience it may have caused.

Monkeys terror in A

Emerging oasis

By Thomas Easton

THE DAILY 747 from London's Heathrow to Cairo is packed not with tourists en route to see the Pyramids. Businessmen fill the seats. They are looking for ways to deploy capital in what was, until very recently, a socialist basket case: Egypt.

The collapse of stock markets in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Russia has made a joke out of Third World investing. Yet almost without notice, Egypt is proving that a poor, belligerently anticapitalist nation can adopt capitalism. The process hasn't been fast or seamless, but then if it were, you wouldn't be finding bargains on the Cairo Stock Exchange.

The combined market capitalisation for what is known as the MENA (Middle East, North Africa) region is all of \$106 billion, just about the same as that of America Online and Yahoo combined. MENA is a collection of emerging nations commonly defined to exclude Israel (because it is too well developed to qualify), Turkey (because it's also part of Europe) and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (because of their restrictions on foreign investors). What's left are Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain, Jordan and some smaller Arab nations. These are not places that ordinarily pop into your mind when you think of international diversification.

You should think again, says Joyce Cornell, manager of Scudder's Emerging Markets Growth Fund. MENA offers a tempting combination of economic growth, reform in the financial markets, a tendency for the economies to move in a different cycle from the rest of the world and, particularly in the case of Egypt, compelling valuations.

Earnings for companies trading on the Cairo Exchange were up 15 per cent in 1998, even as share prices

declined by 30 per cent. So far in 1999 Egyptian stocks have advanced 12 per cent. And they're still cheap by the standards of today's developed markets. EIPICO, the largest drug company in Egypt, goes for nine times earnings and yields 7 per cent. Torab Cement has steady growth in earnings and yields 10 per cent.

Which is not to say there aren't risks. War, a handful of crackpot nations, terrorism and a tough history sour the climate. In the 1950s and 1960s Egypt wrote the book on how to destroy international investment. Holdings built up over decades were expropriated and then asphyxiated in a misguided attempt to create a pan-Arab socialist republic.

Parts of Cairo that were once favourably compared with Paris are covered with thick grime and flecked paint. Hostility toward foreigners continues. Zealots murdered a busload of tourists as recently as late 1997. The legacy of a Soviet-structured bureaucracy has taken years to wind down.

"Anyone who came here more than two years ago was just wasting his time," says Samih Sawiris, chief executive of Orascom, a local conglomerate. Tweak the date and the same could be said for much of MENA.

Since 1994 the Egyptian government has sold off 109 industrial companies to investors, representing a combined \$3 billion in annual revenues, or 4 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. The privatisation has miraculously taken place without the cronyism and kleptocracy capitalism seen in Russia and Latin America. Another 100 companies, including utilities, banks and insurance companies, will be sold soon.

"A decision has been made to pull out [of the economy] completely," says Atef Ebeid, Egypt's minister in charge of privatisations. (Or, almost completely. Oil production —

866,000 barrels a day — will probably not be ceded to foreigners, nor all of the pharmaceutical industry.)

In the early 1990s there wasn't a single private Egyptian company with more than 1,000 employees, says Ebeid. Now there are more than 50, a handful of which are real growth stories. Egypt's once-stagnant economy has averaged a 5 per cent real annual growth for the past three years. Inflation is low, as is external debt (thanks in part to forgiveness following the Gulf war). The government deficit is negligible and, in a key distinction to many other emerging markets, banks are well capitalised and companies carry little debt.

Behind the good numbers is a real change in attitudes. Mohammed Farid Khamis was booted out of Egypt in 1967 for opposing the government. He returned in 1979, after building a successful carpet business in Kuwait, when Egypt's then-president, Anwar Sadat, promised support for private business. Two years later, Khamis had nothing but regrets. Hiring, buying, selling — all required unaffordable bribes to indifferent bureaucrats. "I had lost hope," he says.

A day before he planned to close up, Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, made a surprise inspection. "I said everything was fine," said Khamis. "I thought if we complained we'd be put in jail."

An employee blabbed. Mubarak listened. Obstacles eased. It was, Khamis believes, a beginning for the country. His publicly traded Oriental Weavers Group is now a huge force not only in Egypt but also in Europe.

The main plant, once a lone outpost in a desert outside of Cairo, has been gaining neighbours. A U.S. affiliate domi-

nates the niche for machine-made Oriental throw rugs. The parent group, Oriental Weavers, took in \$700 million in revenue last year. The Egyptian subsidiary, with revenues of \$180 million, trades in Cairo at \$24, or 11 times 1999 earnings.

Egyptian-born Ahmed Zayat, 36, was educated in the United States and would have stayed but for the 1996 privatisation of Al Aham Beverages. Al Aham owns Stella, the former national beer monopoly. Al Aham may have qualified as the most non-consumer-driven consumer products company in the world.

"At one point, even if it had been piss water it would have sold," says Zayat in a midnight interview at the old Al Aham plant where he often works until dawn. "Flying objects" were bottled with the beer (leading to a local joke: Why buy Stella? One thousand roaches can't be wrong). There was no standard recipe; bad batches were blended into good ones.

The shipping room got a \$2 kick-back on the sale of every \$15 case.

The roaches, and the kickbacks, are history. In the past two years Al

Aham has introduced 17 new products, most of them nonalcoholic; not a bad strategy in a country that has numerous Islamic teetotalers. Sales last year were up 33 per cent to \$61.2 million. The stock trades at \$34, or 12 times expected 1999 earnings.

The visible edge of the evolution in Egyptian business emerges on El Sherifein Street. Donkey carts carrying milk trundle past the lovely old Cairo Exchange as they have since 1928, when it was built roughly in the style of the far larger exchange in New York. The dark decades have taken their toll. An elevator running up the spine of the building has long been broken. Pulleys once used to lift buckets of trading tickets from the floor dangle from a vaulted ceiling in need of paint. Chalk boards with the old listings hang unused above an unstable wrought-iron balcony.

It is a scene that will be gone in a year. Already, the two rooms abutting the main floor have been gutted to accommodate cables and transmission equipment. Sherif Raafat, an ex-Kidder Peabody employee at the end of an 18-month tenure heading the stock

exchange while on sabbatical from a local investment firm, sits in a newly renovated office on the third floor.

Raafat keeps a battered 1,042-page book on his desk detailing all the companies listed on the exchange in the early 1950s. Back then, he says, Cairo was the fourth-busiest exchange in the world. By 1961, nationalisation's effectively wiped out trading.

Activity returned in the 1990s with the privatisations and some new issues. Currently 140 brokerage firms provide an active market for 100 companies; hundreds more are traded less frequently. The exchange's market cap is now \$25 billion. That figure could triple overnight with a string of new privatisations of telecom, electricity, bank and insurance companies.

Some 4 million Egyptians work outside of Egypt and send their earnings home. Raafat estimates there is \$80 billion of locally controlled capital in Switzerland that, if conditions were right, could come home. Cairo was once a rich, dynamic market. It could be once again.

— Forbes

Emerging Middle Eastern stocks

Company	Country	Sector	Market cap (\$US mil)	P/E 1999*	Dividend yield
Arabian Intl Contractors	Egypt	Construction	\$166.5	10.1	17.0%
EAB	Egypt	Banking	190.6	5.3	11.4
EFIC	Egypt	Real Estate	118.5	6.9	8.4
Heliopolis Housing	Egypt	Property	301.4	9.3	9.5
North Cairo Flour Mills	Egypt	Milling	97.1	8.1	11.6
Suez Cement*	Egypt	Cement	907.9	10.6	7.9
Arab Bank*	Jordan	Banking	2,694.4	9.9	1.5
Arab Potash Co.	Jordan	Chemicals	454.4	10.9	4.9
Dar Al Dawa	Jordan	Pharmaceuticals	34.8	4.9	7.8
BLC Byblos*	Lebanon	Banking	701.0	5.7	4.0
SFBT	Tunisia	Beverages	136.5	13.8	2.5
STB	Tunisia	Banking	202.2	7.1	6.8

* Estimated *GDRs available

Source: Nomura Securities



They may look cute, but in Abkhazia they are terrifying the locals after apparently escaping from an experimental breeding centre (file photo)

Monkeys spread reign of terror in Abkhazia

By Sergei Minayev
Agence France Presse

WHEN ANTONINA Sergeeva, 69, went to her hen house recently to fetch some eggs, the strange noises inside told her immediately that something was wrong.

"When I looked inside I saw to my horror that monkeys were chasing the hens, upsetting everything as they went."

Sergeeva lost three hens that day, half her stock, a disaster for someone relying on the sale of eggs to eke out her meagre pension.

For the residents of Soukhumi, capital of Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia on the Black Sea, such an incident was nothing unusual. Monkeys have been their unwelcome neighbours ever since the civil war of 1992-93.

Until then Soukhumi had housed the largest experimental breeding centre in the former Soviet Union, containing more than 7,000 animals. But during the fighting artillery fire hit the enclosures, enabling the inmates to escape.

"After the war only 270 primates remained," said the centre's director, Sergei Ardzimba. "The rest

escaped, were killed or simply stolen. The soldiers used to shoot at the monkeys to amuse themselves."

Many of the animals were used for unique scientific experiments. Ardzimba said, while Alik Alia, a keeper at the centre at the beginning of the war, recalled that some cages bore the notice "Beware AIDS."

Experts do not rule out many of the monkeys carrying viruses dangerous to humans, but no one knows how many are still at large in Abkhazia. But everyone says they are bold and aggressive, driven by hunger and an unfamiliar habitat.

Mirab, 20, described how he was celebrating a birthday with friends in woods about 15 kilometres from the city.

"One of the girls had gone to look for firewood, when we heard her screaming and ran to her aid. We found her surrounded by about a dozen monkeys which were trying to snatch a bowl filled with wood strawberries from her."

"When we got there they left, but without hurrying and reluctantly, without showing the slightest fear," he added.

But it's an ill wind... The Abkhazians, who are usu-

ally badly paid, have learned that the monkeys are worth money, capturing and selling them to Turkish dealers.

"I can sell a monkey for around \$20, which is enough to meet my needs for at least a month," said Akic, 35. "My wife doesn't work and I must feed my five-year-old son."

"In Soviet times it was already difficult to find a good job here, and since the war it has become impossible, but if I can catch five monkeys a year we are saved."

"The Turks don't haggle because they know that can sell the monkeys for at least \$100 apiece at home. And the people here thank me for it, because these creatures have brought us nothing but trouble."

Handover of IRA weapons a huge psychological barrier: Experts

By Henry Meyer
Agence France Presse

NORTHERN IRELAND leaders face a monumental task in unblocking the frozen peace process because of the IRA's deep psychological resistance to the handover of its weapons, experts say.

Less than three weeks before the first anniversary of the province's historic April 1998 peace accord, Protestant leader David Trimble continues to demand a start to disarmament before he allows Sinn Fein into government.

But the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political wing will not play ball, adamant that despite an end to three decades of war against British rule and pro-British Protestant guerrillas, they cannot relax their guard.

"There has never been a history of Irish paramilitary groups on the republican side surrendering weapons," said Sean Boyne, a writer on Irish affairs for the respected London-based journal Jane's Intelligence Review.

"Psychologically, it's been regarded as an admission of defeat," he explained.

Trimble, who faces strong dissent within party ranks to the peace

accord, would court political suicide if he were to drop his demand for the IRA to begin disarming before he sits down at the cabinet table with Sinn Fein.

Defence experts estimate the IRA's arsenal at some two-and-a-half-tonnes of the powerful explosive Semtex, 100 assault rifles, a number of mortars, 40 rocket-launchers and even several SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles.

But Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams and other top republican figures who have made giant strides for peace — abandoning the goal of a united Ireland for the foreseeable future — are afraid of a bullet in the head.

"There is a fear on the part of the republican movement that if it gives up its weapons there will be a split," said Professor Adrian Guelke, professor of modern Irish politics at Queen's University in Belfast.

"Splits leads to feuds and feuds lead to members of the organisation getting killed," he added.

The fear of provoking a republican split has its roots deep in Ireland's troubled history.

After the south of Ireland gained independence in 1921 from Britain, the IRA guerrilla leader Michael

'There has never been a history of Irish paramilitary groups on the republican side surrendering weapons'

Collins was assassinated by former comrades, enraged that he had accepted continued British rule in the north.

Years of bitter civil war followed between the government in Dublin and sections of the guerrilla army which refused to give up their goal of independence for the entire island.

Then in 1969, at the beginning of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland, Protestant extremists began to attack Roman Catholic areas, which were left defenceless because the IRA had abandoned the gun in favour of Marxist agitation.

That led to the creation of the Provisional IRA — which re-armed and took on both its Protestant rivals and the British security forces, assuming the mantle of the republican movement.

"The accusation against Gerry Adams that he has surrendered is pretty strong among dissident republican groups," said Professor Guelke.

"By being very tough on the decommissioning issue, it's way of answering those critics, it's a way of saying this shows we're not surrendering, this shows we haven't been defeated."

Adams' determination is bolstered by the fact that under the letter of the April 10 accord, the IRA and other paramilitary groups were given until May 2000 to disarm, and no pre-condition was attached to joining the government.

In addition, the Protestant loyalist militias have refused to begin dismantling their much smaller arsenals.

"The IRA has always thought of itself as a defender of the nationalist community," said Boyne.

"They hark back to the early years of the Troubles, when there were loyalist attacks on Catholic areas."

Human rights take back seat to poverty in Malawi elections

By Felix Mponda
Agence France Presse

HUMAN RIGHTS, once the focus of contention in post-democracy Malawi, are no longer an issue five years after President Bakili Muluzi swept to power in the country's first democratic elections.

As Malawians wait to vote in the second multi-party elections May 25, human rights questions have taken a back seat to the ills of the agriculture-based economy and the poverty which afflicts 60 per cent of the 10.9 million people.

"The fact of the matter is that we have democracy. Human rights is no longer our problem. Our problem is the economy," said Charles Simango, editor-in-chief of the main opposition Daily Times.

Simango, often critical of the Muluzi administration in his weekly commentary, said: "Yes, there may be a lot of cell phones, newspapers and minibuses, but that has not helped the villager who needs food and affordable essentials."

Food security is a pressing issue in

Malawi, where an estimated 60 per cent of rural households are unable to meet their nutritional requirements.

And the question of food raises the political temperature in this impoverished southern African country which last year imported 120,000 tonnes of maize from neighbouring countries to ward off massive hunger.

Muluzi is widely expected to win the elections, but political commentators say the greatest threat to his chances is poverty and hunger.

Muluzi admits that "not only is poverty a social evil, but also a threat to democracy."

If elected for his second and last term, he says he will continue with his policy of poverty alleviation which is a central plank of his government's development agenda.

Muluzi says this means not just providing food, but social amenities and business opportunities.

"Where there was no food, there should be food. As long as people are going about with empty stomachs, then talk of democracy will be meaningless. Malawians cannot eat democracy," he said.

Observers say although Muluzi has little to show from his first five-year term, the general feeling is that the president should be given a chance to complete the unfinished business.

With a fragile economy and annual growth averaging two per cent in the last decade, the daunting challenge will be to find the money to pay for increasing social needs and a \$2.2 billion external debt, as well as create employment for 145,000 people who enter the labour market annually.

Gwanda Chakumba, main presidential candidate of the opposition electoral alliance between the Malawi Congress Party and the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), hits at the Muluzi administration for economic decay.

"Malawi has been reduced to a nation of people who survive on bran," he says.

Chakumba says the country has been driven to economic ruin because of having no clear economic policies, though the opposition alliance's plans are also somewhat vague. "Up to three million people remain unemployed and most people sleep on empty stom-

achs," he charged.

Malawi has less than two million people in gainful employment.

Another presidential contender, Bingu Wa Mutharika, leader of the United Party, says his party will fight against social and economic injustice to ensure real development takes place equitably in all parts of the country.

Mutharika, former secretary general of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), said Malawi was poor by choice because "those in power are too engrossed in self-survival and adopted a system of management through chaos."

He attacks Muluzi's United Democratic Front, saying it has not provided strong leadership to give political, social and economic direction and has lost its credibility.

"Malawi has no clear development policy and no practical strategy which will kick-start economic growth, reverse underdevelopment and eradicate poverty," he alleged.

Columnist Simango says: "We need serious finance-oriented leaders to take us out of the economic mess." But in Malawi, such leaders are a rare breed.

Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Vehicles Owners Federation Company to distribute dividends at a rate of 12%

ALTHOUGH THE net income generated by the Vehicles Owners Federation Company amounted to JD253,000 during 1998, the total profit available for distribution to shareholders was JD304,000. The company said it earned JD138,600 from its investment of JD1.9 million in the Unified Company for Organising Land Transport and JD145,000 from rent collected from tenants in addition to other commission income. The total earnings posted by the company last year amounted to JD416,000.

Board Chairman Mustafa Abu Qoura told the shareholders that the company is working on raising income through various contacts and through studying all investment and telecommunication projects as well as bidding for any tenders or offers that might generate

profit or benefit to improve the earnings of the company.

He cautioned of lower earnings in the future as a result of pressure from the Aqaba Regional Authority on tenants who might not pay the rent of the premises owned by the company in Aqaba. The authority is demanding that the tenants evacuate the premises and move to another new site assigned to the Unified Company.

The firm's total assets stood at around JD2.7 million at the end of 1998 compared to JD2.5 million at the end of 1997. Shareholders' equity totalled JD2.36 million last year.

The general assembly concluded the meeting by approving the distribution of JD144,000 in dividends at a rate of 12 per cent (AJ Ra'i + AJ Aswaq + AJ Arab Al Yawm).

Real Estate Investment Company to distribute dividends at a rate of 7%

THE GENERAL assembly of the Real Estate Investment Company/Akarcos has approved the distribution of JD330,000 in dividends at a rate of seven per cent after examining the company's financial results during an ordinary meeting. According to the annual report, the earnings from renting the commercial Akarcos Centre amounted to JD562,100 of which JD337,300 were the portion of the company's 60 per cent share in the building.

The company also secured a rewarding JD70,300 profit from selling three plots of lands in the Nweigees area. Board Chairman Jamil Barakat told the general assembly. He also mentioned that a 226-square-metre apartment was sold for JD65,000 despite the economic recession which has dampened demand for residential apartments. "Two apartments remain in the building situated in northern Abdoun and

we hope we will be able to sell them this year if conditions improve as they are of high quality and specifications," Barakat added.

The chairman indicated that as a result of recession, the Amman Stock Exchange is still weak and that the company was forced to raise the reserve for lower share prices to become JD108,000. "Should share prices improve, this reserve will be a support for the company's financial position," Barakat said.

The company achieved a JD226,000 net profit last year compared to JD257,000 in 1997. Total assets amounted to JD5.9 million (JD5.7 million in 1997). Current liabilities climbed from JD545,000 in 1997 to JD817,000 at the end of 1998. Shareholders' equity went down slightly from JD5.2 million to JD5.1 million (AJ Dustour + AJ Arab Al Yawm + AJ Ra'i).

CANBERRA (AFP) — Australian brothels are making more than 1.0 million dollars (\$630,000) a week from Asian sex slaves brought in illegally and forced to live in terrible conditions, a crime conference heard Tuesday.

Hundreds of the women were smuggled into Australia by organised crime syndicates, said Australian Institute of Criminology Director Adam Graycar.

"Links have been established between organised crime and the illegal trafficking of Asian prostitutes in Australia," he told the National Crime Symposium.

The high profit potential, combined with the difficulty of detection and comparatively low penalties for prosecution, has resulted in the spread of groups engaged in these activities," he said.

Graycar said the women were brought into Australia by syndicates which supplied them to different brothels.

"These women's movements are often tightly controlled," he said. "It has been found that some prostitutes were escorted between their

Australian brothels make fortune from Asian sex slaves

place of residence and the brothel at which they worked — they were not allowed out even to go shopping by themselves.

With 200 to 300 Asian women working illegally in the Australian sex trade at any one time it was estimated that brothels were earning as much as 1.0 million dollars from them each week.

Graycar said more than 75 per cent of the 1,714 people who arrived illegally by boat and air in 1997-98 were believed to have been brought to Australia by "human traffickers."

A 1993 study of Thai sex workers found that most of the women had chosen the work because it paid well, although others did not have such control over their situa-

tion. Many were on travel visas and stayed only three months while others overstayed their visas and some stayed permanently through arranged marriages.

Finding witnesses to prosecute traffickers was difficult, Graycar said. "The few who do come to the attention of Australian authorities and reveal their terrible

living conditions take enormous risks," he said.

"There have been cases of women disappearing after returning to their homeland," he added.

The conference was told that Australia had trained its immigration officers to identify and detect bogus documentation, working closely with police and international authorities.

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HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Looks like a loved one has been nagging you to fix something up around the house. You may have resisted because you didn't know how, but you can't use that excuse anymore. All you have to do is give the OK and the whole thing is as good as done. So get out of the way and let it happen.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You may feel under pressure now, but that's OK. It's actually forcing you to learn something new, and once you do that, you'll be amazed at how much more you can accomplish. So stop resisting and get into it!

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Looks like you have a couple of good sources of income today — one from the work you're doing and the other more like a gift from somebody far away. Or it could be an excellent deal you make by purchasing something through a catalogue. Money saved is the same as money earned, you know.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) You look marvellous. That's partially because the moon is now in your sign. Since the moon is your ruling orb, it empowers you magnificently, and today you may need it. Looks like you're up against some tough competition.

LEO: (July 23 to August 23) This seems like a good day to travel, but it really isn't. There are too many things that have to be done that can't be put off any longer. A person who's starting to whine at you is a good example. You're getting rather irritated, but that's not doing any good. What'll solve the problem is simply to do what's required, quickly.

VIRGO: (August 23 to September 22) Your friends really come through for you today, and that's wonderful. You've had a tough first part of the week, and you don't need any more stress now. What you need instead is a nice dinner in an excellent, affordable, healthy restaurant.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) A friend's encouragement helps you push higher than you've ever gone before, and the view is a little different from up there. For one thing, you can see that the people at the next level are just people, not demigods. Don't push too hard, though, while they're getting to know you. Some of them might have a tendency to bite.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Conditions have changed slightly in your favour, and this should make it easier for you to see what to do next. You've got pretty good intuition yourself, but one of your friends is awesome. Consult this person for advice on how to proceed.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Money, money, money. If you're like most Sagittarians, you've been known to live by your wits alone. They don't generally worry about money. It's there when you need it — or else you don't need it. Well, today you might consider putting some away for the future. It could come in handy later, and this is a good time to save.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) A friend is being particularly annoying today — needing you, testing you, taunting you, possibly pushing you to try something you have no interest in at all. The only trouble is, this person has a pretty good argument. Hmm. Check with another friend first. If two out of three tell you to go for it, maybe you should give it a try.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) If your work seems to be giving you ulcers, it could be you're taking it too seriously. Maybe something is going on that you don't quite understand, or you're making a matter into a bigger deal than it really is. Most likely, there just isn't that much to understand. Lighten up and the problem will solve itself.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Now, this is more like it. Today you should have more time to spend with a warm, caring, loving person. At least spend a meal together. That's one of your favourite experiences to share. Go for an excellent meal at an excellent restaurant, if at all possible.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

Elba House wins JD5.5m contract to assemble buses

AMMAN (Petra) —The Jordanian Elba House firm Tuesday won a JD 5.5 million contract to build and assemble 45 Volvo buses to be used by the Al Tafiq Transport and Investment Company (TTIC) within the Amman region.

The project will be financed by the Jordan Islamic Bank whose board chairman and director general signed the deal with Mohammad Khashman, Khaled Arnouti, and Ahmad Abul Saud from TTIC together with Elba House General Manager Usama Khouri.

Under the provisions of the agreement Elba House will purchase the frames (body) of the vehicles and their spare parts from the Volvo firm in Sweden and assemble them in accordance with the specifications set by the Public Transport Corporation and the traffic and licensing departments of the Public Security Department.

The agreement provides for Elba House to turn over the buses to the TTIC within 45 days after the arrival of the frames at the rate of 15 buses a

month. The agreement falls in line with the government's declared plan of modernising the public transport sector which is run by the private sector, according to ministry of transport officials.

They said the 66-seat buses will be used along routes within the areas of the University of Jordan, Abu Nuseir district, Shafa Badran, Sweileh, Baqaa, Fubeis, Tareq and the Sports City neighbourhoods.

Minister of Post, Transport and Telecommunications Jamal Saraireh, who attended the signing ceremony paid tribute to the Islamic Bank for its contribution to the national economy. He said the government is providing all facilities for investors in the transport and the other production sectors.

Both the TTIC Manager Mohammad Khashman and the Islamic Bank's director paid tribute to Elba House company describing it as one of the leading firms in Jordan specialising in vehicles production in order to modernise the transport services.

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Jazireh's Odeh nominated for Asian All-Star team

By Aileen Bannayan

AMMAN — Al Jazireh's star centre Ma'an Odeh is the only Jordanian player to have been nominated for the 1999 Asian All-Star match due to be held in Guangzhou, China in October.

The 22-year-old forward was nominated among 21 players by a special Asian Basketball Confederation panel after his strong showing at the Asian Championship which was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, last year where Jordan finished seventh.

Odeh also seems to have left an impressive mark as a member of the Arab All-Star team in Lebanon last October where he was top rebounder and scorer among the Arab World's best players.

"We are all proud of Ma'an. He has become the backbone of our team and is sure to make Jordanian fans proud if he plays in China," Jazireh's head coach Fadi Sabbah told the Jordan Times.

Odeh is one of five Arab players shortlisted among the 21 top stars for the final Asian All-Star extravaganza of the 20th century which will be staged from Oct. 8-10.

"It's an honour for me to be named among the top 21 players in Asia. Being nominated for the team is also



Ma'an Odeh attempts a slam dunk during Al Jazireh's match against Al Ahli in the 1998 First Division Basketball Championship (file photo)

an honour as a Jordanian. I hope I'll be among the final 12 players chosen, as I'll be representing the Kingdom," said the 205-centimetre

Odeh. Other Arab players nominated are Majeed Ali of Bahrain, Yassin Mahmoud of Qatar, Fadi Al Khatib of

Lebanon and compatriot NBA star Rony Seikaly, a former Miami Heat player now with the New Jersey Nets.

Odeh put his name on the map of Jordanian basketball after he led the Kingdom's Under-18 national team to the World Youth Championship in 1995 after scoring the winning basket against the Philippines at the Asian Junior Championship where Jordan won the bronze medal.

His teammate, Zeid Alkhas, twice played on the Asian All-Star team after being nominated by the Jordan Basketball Federation to be on the line-up.

The nominated players this year include 5 from Japan, 6 from South Korea, 2 from Chinese Taipei, 1 each from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

Odeh has been a member of the men's national team since the Pan-Arab Games in 1997. He now trains twice a day, five times a week, with the national team preparing for the Pan-Arab Games.

The team just returned from Lebanon where they had a training camp and played six matches against local teams. Jordan won three, against Antranig, Kahraba nad Neptune clubs and lost to Homentmen, Tadamon and Kahraba.

Courier leads U.S. Davis Cup team

KEY BISCAINE (AFP) — Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi will not stand in Britain's path during next month's Davis Cup opener.

Jim Courier, Todd Martin, Alex O'Brien and Jan-Michael Gambill were named here Monday to represent the United States in their 1999 Davis Cup opener April 2-4 at Birmingham, England.

U.S. team captain Tom Gullikson named the players for the best-of-five tie. While three are among the world's top 52 ranked players, they are lacking past number one Sampras and Agassi, who has vowed to never play Davis Cup again.

"It is really an honour to play for your country," O'Brien said. "I wish the rest of our guys felt that way."

Martin is the highest-ranked American on the squad at 10th, his best standing in more than four years. He has appeared in five consecutive Davis Cups, is 13-7 in the international competition and is 29-7 this season with a title in Sydney. He skipped this week's ATP event here to prepare.

Courier, a former World No. 1, is 52nd with a 15-9 mark in six Davis Cup appearances. A two-time winner of the Australian and French Opens, Courier clinched both U.S. Davis victories last year, defeating Russia's Marat Safin in the decisive first-round singles match.

Gambill, 21, and O'Brien, 29, will be making their second Davis Cup appearances. Gambill, rated 44th, split a pair of matches in the loss last year to Italy and O'Brien did the same in 1997 against Brazil.

Gambill ousted Sampras and Agassi on his way to his first ATP title in Scotland earlier this month.

The United States is coming off an embarrassing 4-1 loss to Italy in the 1998 semi-finals and has the difficult first-round task of facing Britain in the 100-year celebration of the event.

Playing in the prestigious World Group for the first time since 1992, Britain boasts two top-13 players in Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski.

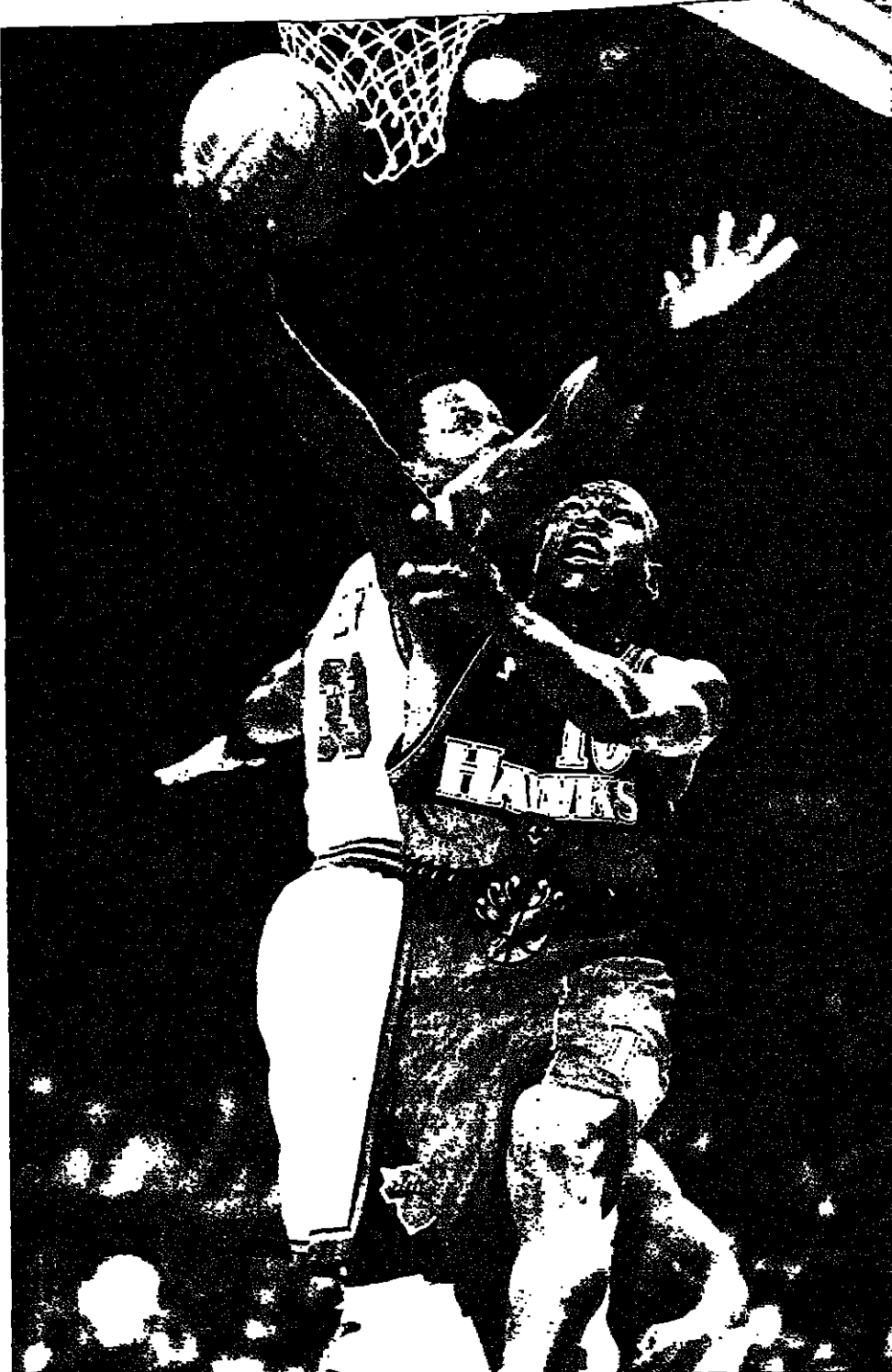
In last year's loss to Italy, the Americans were without Sampras, Agassi and Michael Chang, who has dropped to 39th in the world. This year's team has the added pressure of keeping the U.S. undefeated against Britain since 1935.

The first-round tie will be the first meeting between the nations since the 1978 final, when John McEnroe made his Davis Cup debut.

The Americans captured one of their record 31 titles that year. They have taken the last three meetings with Britain and lead the series, 10-7.

Should the U.S. team win, it would host either Australia or Zimbabwe in a quarter-final tie at the Longwood Cricket Club in Boston.

Longwood hosted the first Davis Cup tie in 1900 and is guaranteed either the quarter-final tie or a qualifying-round tie in July in conjunction with the event's 100th anniversary celebration.



Atlanta Hawks' Mookie Blaylock (R) puts a shot up under defensive pressure from the New York Knicks' Patrick Ewing (L) in the first quarter at Madison Square Garden in New York (AFP photo)

Shaq in fighting mood after beating Mavericks

DALLAS (R) — Shaquille O'Neal was in a fighting mood after the Lakers won their second game in a row to finish a gruelling 3-3 road trip on Monday.

O'Neal scored 25 points to help Los Angeles master the Mavericks 96-93 but afterwards the huge centre said he was fed up with all the fouls against him that were not called.

"Somebody's going to get their nose broken some day," O'Neal said. "I promise you before I get hurt, somebody else is going to get broke up."

"Before I get hurt, somebody is going to get broke up. If (Commissioner) David Stern doesn't want to do anything about it... well hey, if that's how they want to play, I'll play like that." Los Angeles coach Kurt Rambis said he felt fortunate to return home 3-3. "It was a long and hard trip," he said.

Kobe Bryant added 21 points and Dennis Rodman, playing his second game after missing four games due to personal reasons, grabbed 17 rebounds as the Lakers defeated the Mavericks for the 15th straight time.

Bryant, who scored 38 points in Sunday's 115-104 win over Orlando, gave the Lakers the lead for good when he converted a three-point play with 4:33 left in the third quarter.

In Seattle, Allen Iverson may be the NBA's leading scorer, but Gary Payton showed he is still the best all-around guard in the league.

Payton had 26 points,

eight assists and six rebounds, outdueling Iverson and leading the Seattle SuperSonics to their 12th straight victory over the Philadelphia 76ers, 92-76.

Perhaps inspired by the potential for a great 1-on-1 matchup, Payton was 9-of-22 from the field after shooting only 29 per cent (13-of-45) over his previous three games.

One of the NBA's best defensive players, Payton held Iverson to 14 points on 4-of-13 shooting.

In Indianapolis, a 15-point burst by the Pacers was just enough to overcome a 14-point run by Mitch Richmond as Indiana took a 90-86 victory over the Washington Wizards.

The Pacers scored the first 15 points of the fourth quarter to open a 10-point lead, then survived a scoring spree by Richmond, who had 14 of his 35 points in the final period.

Reggie Miller scored 18 points to lead the Pacers.

In Houston, Hakeem Olajuwon scored a season-high 32 points as the Houston Rockets remained hot with a 110-100 victory.

The Rockets (17-9) have won four straight and seven of their last eight games, shaking off the inconsistency they displayed during a 10-8 start.

Charles Barkley grabbed 16 rebounds to go with 19 points for Houston and Scottie Pippen added 25 points.

Vernon Maxwell, a member of the Rockets' back-to-back NBA championship teams in 1994-95, scored a

season-high 25 points in 28 minutes off the bench for Sacramento.

In New York, another fourth-quarter collapse brought out the boo birds at Madison Square Garden as the Knicks suffered their third loss in four games, 80-71 to the Atlanta Hawks.

Mookie Blaylock scored 15 points to pace the Hawks, who made just 5-of-17 shots in the fourth quarter but held the Knicks to an anemic 2-of-18.

At New Jersey, Stephen Marbury scored 31 points and Chris Carr tallied 11 of his career-high 24 in the first quarter, when the New Jersey Nets raced to an 18-point lead on the way to a 106-87 victory over the Toronto Raptors.

The Nets, who had lost 10 of the last 11 games, halted Toronto's franchise-record five game winning streak.

In Phoenix, Jason Kidd scored 24 points as the Phoenix Suns snapped a three-game losing streak with an 89-84 victory over the slumping Vancouver Grizzlies.

Tom Gugliotta added 19 points and 11 rebounds for the Suns, who got back to the .500 mark. Shareef Abdur-Rahim collected 26 points for Vancouver.

In Milwaukee, Ray Allen scored 14 of his 19 points in the first quarter, including seven during a game-opening 23-2 run, as the Bucks cruised to 115-86 win over the Detroit Pistons.

Detroit, meanwhile, went a woeful 1-of-12 from the field in the first quarter.

Robson wants to coach England again

LONDON (AFP) — Former England manager Bobby Robson on Tuesday declared his interest in returning to the job after Kevin Keegan ends his four-game stint in charge of national side.

Robson, currently the coach of Dutch side PSV Eindhoven, said: "Kevin Keegan is saying that he will not stay in the England job after the four games he is contracted for and there are no obvious candidates to succeed him."

"I would love to do the England job for two years and allow the FA time to prepare the younger manager they feel is the long-term man for the job."

"I am a better manager now than when I was in charge of England. But it is up to the FA. They will have to decide whether they think it is a good idea," he told The Express newspaper.

Ahead of Saturday's Euro 2000 qualifier against Poland at Wembley, Robson has also reiterated his belief that it is impossible to do the England job on a part-time basis.

"The FA should have offered Keegan whatever money it took to get him full-time. The present situation is a mistake," he said.

"Poland played a match the other week, didn't they? Where was Keegan? He wasn't there, was he?"

Holyfield looking forward to Lewis rematch

LONDON (AFP) — Evander Holyfield said Tuesday that he is looking forward to a rematch with Lennox Lewis and indicated he would prefer a September showdown in Las Vegas as the pair face a second bout to decide the undisputed world heavyweight champion.

WBA and IBF champion Holyfield told the British Broadcasting Corporation he did not feel he was fortunate to get a draw against WBC champion Lewis at Madison Square Garden in their controversial bout 10 days ago.

The American said he had underlined his determination to become undisputed champion before retiring by committing himself to a rematch with Lewis.

"I've signed a contract already and I'm looking forward to it," said Holyfield. "Hopefully we'll go ahead and settle this thing."

Asked when and where the fight would be staged, Holyfield replied: "I really don't know, but September's a good month for me

and I would like it to be in Vegas."

September, however, seems an unlikely month for the rematch with U.S. television giants and fight paymasters HBO already scheduling a big pay-per-view event featuring Oscar De La Hoya for that period.

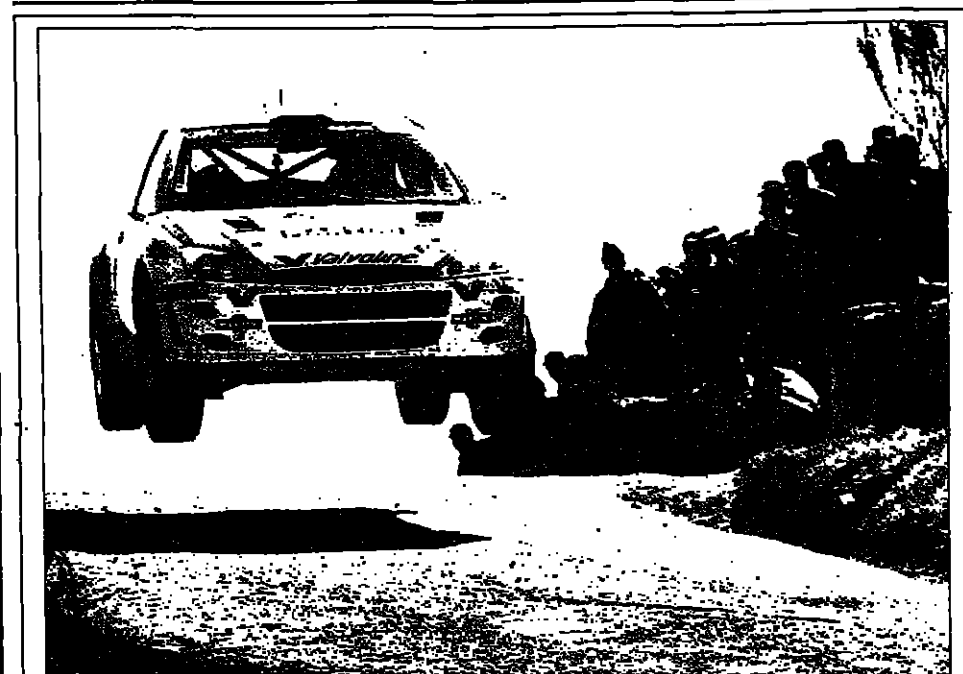
Holyfield, who has watched a video tape of his fight with Lewis, admits he was not at his best.

He told Radio 4's Today programme: "We have had days at the office but we have to get over the bad days. It wasn't a great day for me but I got through it."

"The fact is Lennox fought a smart fight and a good fight but we both didn't do enough to be called undisputed champion."

Holyfield also claimed that he was not convinced Lewis had won several rounds awarded to him by the judges.

"Some of the rounds were questionable," he said.



Scottish rally driver Colin McRae leaps in his Ford Focus during the second day of the Rally of Portugal in Fafe. McRae and his co-pilot Nicky Grist are leading after two stages (AFP photo)

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Athens bid committee dragged further into Olympic scandal

SYDNEY (AFP) — Athens 1996 Olympic bid committee ordered many expensive gems from one of the city's top jewellers, suggesting for the first time it may have had dubious dealings with International Olympic Committee (IOC) members, a report said Tuesday.

One of the pieces of fine jewellery Evi Tsimbilis supplied was the hand-crafted gold necklace allegedly given to embattled Australian International Olympic Committee member Phil Coles on board a yacht in 1990 by a businessman connected with the bid.

The revelations come as the IOC's 11-strong executive board carries out an investigation into claims Coles received inducements from Athens and a major Olympic sponsor joined the call for him to resign.

On Saturday, the IOC said it was contacting Coles' ex-wife Georgina after she sent a fax to IOC headquarters in

Lausanne claiming she was there when he was given the jewellery.

A letter has also gone to the Greek Olympic Committee demanding further information.

Athens, which failed in its bid, is believed to have told the IOC that it knew of no unethical behaviour by any IOC official during the bid process.

Tsimbilis, whose family runs the Michalis jewellery shop on Panepistimiou Street, told the Sydney Morning Herald the Athens bid committee had approached her to make "some presents."

"The Athens bid committee came to us and asked us to make some jewellery," she said from Athens.

"They wanted to do some presents and asked us for some very fine jewellery. They liked to choose characteristic things from our history... there were many things..."

The paper showed her a

photograph of Coles' ex-wife wearing what is claimed to be the necklace her husband was given.

Tsimbilis said her company had definitely made it, because it was a one-off design as a part of a collection.

She could not remember the exact price but said it was the most expensive item her shop made for the bid committee and it would have cost at least A\$10,000 (\$6,300).

IOC members were not allowed to accept gifts worth more than \$250.

Tsimbilis said she remembered that many pieces sold to the bid committee were small brooches worth up to \$950, but there were at least two specially designed necklaces.

Meanwhile, a major Olympic sponsor called for Coles to resign from the IOC ahead of a two-day meeting of Sydney 2000 sponsors.

Moya out as Sampras eyes return to No. 1

KEY BISCAYNE (AFP) — Men's world number one, Spain's Carlos Moya, was dumped out of the Lipton Championships by young Frenchman Sebastien Grosjean here on Monday.

Grosjean, a 20-year-old right-hander from Marseille, won 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (11/9), taking the tie on his second match point.

Moya became the first Spaniard ever to hold the number one ranking when he took over from

Pete Sampras a week ago.

But he appeared to be wearing his crown uneasily at the weekend against first Davide Sanguinetti of Italy and then had to force his way back from a set and a break down against Jason Stoltenberg.

And on Monday he sank miserably after winning the first set as Grosjean scored a deserved win.

The Spaniard's defeat left Sampras just a win away from moving back

into top spot, which he hoped to achieve later Monday against Albert Costa of Spain.

Grosjean, ranked 74 on the computer, shrugged off his bad start to win in 2 hours 40 minutes as Moya spurned three match points in the tiebreak.

"It's the greatest moment of my career," said Grosjean afterwards. "I'm exhausted, but I felt he was there for the taking."

The Frenchman next plays either Chilean



Mary Pierce of France serves to Virginia Ruano Pascual of Spain in the fourth round at the Lipton WTA Championships tennis tournament in Key Biscayne. Pierce beat Pascual 6-1, 6-1 (AFP photo)



Serena Williams of the U.S. powers into a back hand in her third round match against Magui Serna of Spain at The Lipton Championships Tennis Tournament in Key Biscayne. Williams won 6-1, 6-0 (AFP photo)

eighth seed Marcelo Rios or Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty.

Elsewhere, British hope Greg Rusedski followed Tim Henman out of the tournament in losing to German Nicolas Pietrangeli.

The British number two went down 6-4, 5-7, 2-6.

Rusedski looked set for a stylish victory after the first set, but his game fell apart late in the second and he failed to regain his form in the third.

Kiefer broke serve at 2-2 in the decisive set and then finished off Rusedski in quick time with another break in the seventh game to run out a comfortable winner.

Fourth-seeded Spaniard Alex Corretja slid out to Sweden's Thomas Enqvist 7-5, 6-3, while Dutch seventh seed Richard Krajicek blasted

Russian youngster Marat Safin away 6-3, 6-1 to set up a potential clash with Sampras.

U.S. hope Vincent Spadea, having beaten Yevgeny Kafelnikov, was unable to get past Spain's Francisco Clavet, who won 7-5, 4-6, 6-4.

In women's third round play, Russia's Anna Kournikova edged out France's Julie Halard-Decugis 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), U.S. youngster Serena Williams crushed Magui Serna of Spain 6-1, 6-0.

South Africa's Amanda Coetzer ended the hopes of Canada's Maureen Drake 6-4, 6-4.

Germany's Anke Huber beat Ruxandra Dragomir of Romania 6-4, 7-6 (7/1) and Austria's Barbara Schett ousted Anne Kremer of Luxembourg 6-4, 6-2.



Xue Shen flies in the air as she performs with Hongbo Zhao of China in the short programme at the World Figure Skating Championships in Helsinki (AFP photo)

Trainer predicts record at Dubai World Cup

DUBAI (AFP) — Organisers and trainers are predicting a record-breaking run at the world's richest horse race in Dubai on Sunday.

"The track looks terrific and I'm sure we'll see a record," said American trainer Richard Mandella, who returns for the five-million-dollar 1999 Dubai World Cup with last year's fourth-placed Malek.

Mandella, the sole overseas trainer to compete in all four editions of the Cup, is confident the five-year-old Chilean-bred Malek, who won the 1998 Santa

Anita Handicap last year, will go better this time.

He rested the horse from this year's Santa Anita and has been training under lights on the Nad Al-Sheba dirt track.

But punters feel defending champion Silver Charm, trained by Bob Baffert, will again take some beating.

Kentucky Derby hopefuls Worldly Manner and Ajabr

from the Goldolphin stables reportedly bettered the track record on Sunday during trials over a mile and one furlong.

"They were flying," World Cup organising committee chairman Michael Osborne said. "If the trials were held for another furlong they would have bettered the Kentucky Derby time. This is pretty amazing and shows just how fast the

course is performing."

The fastest run for the 2,000-metre World Cup was recorded in 1997 by Sing Spiel at 2min 1.91sec.

Jockeys have been quoted in the local press saying the loose sand surface over a hard sand base has never been better.

Despite the reports, Osborne has admitted the race could be switched to turf in the future.

"I'm not saying we will, but it's a theory that can't be ruled out," he told Tuesday's Gulf News. A decision was likely in June.

Some punters believe the dirt track, a galloping course for big-striding horses, favours American dirt specialists and leaves Europe's traditional turf stables with only an outside chance.

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NORTH
♠ A K 10
♥ 7 4 1
♦ A J 10 8 3
♣ 6 4

WEST
♠ 9 7 4
♥ A Q J 10 8
♦ 6 5 3
♣ Q 7 2

EAST
♠ 8 6 5 3
♥ 6 5
♦ Q 7 2
♣ J 10 9 5

SOUTH
♠ Q J 2
♥ K 9 5
♦ K 9 4
♣ A K 8 3

The bidding:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1NT Pass 3NT Pass

Opening lead: Queen of ♣

It is not easy to see how declarer can come to nine tricks at three no trump without having to locate the queen of diamonds. Can you find a way to make the contract no matter which defender holds the lady?

With only 12 high-card points and a five-card suit that was not solid, North wisely did no more than raise

South's opening no trump to game. Any investigation could impair the contract.

West led the queen of hearts, and declarer could count only six fast tricks outside diamonds. If the heart king was taken at trick one, that meant that diamonds would have to produce three tricks and the percentage play, taking the suit in isolation, is to rely on a finesse since South could not afford to lose a trick to either defender without risking defeat. However, there is no clue which defender holds the diamond queen.

Declarer found an elegant way to insure the contract against any distribution. South allowed West's queen to hold the first trick! If West continued with hearts, declarer could then win with the king and take the diamond finesse into the East hand. East would either be out of hearts, or the suit would break 4-3.

West therefore abandoned hearts and made the safe shift to a spade. Declarer countered by winning in dummy and running the jack of diamonds. If it lost to West, the king of hearts was safe from attack and declarer would have nine tricks by scoring four in diamonds. Either way, the no-trump game was in the bag.

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If you registered prior to March 1, 1999, please confirm your presence in Jordan by re-registering as soon as possible.

Any citizens not re-registered by April 29, 1999, the embassy will consider to have departed Jordan and their names will be deleted from the Register.

The Australian Embassy is located in Jabal Amman, between 4th & 5th Circles, next to the Ministry of Social Development.

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